MY QUEEN

A WEEKLY JOURNAL FOR YOUNG WOMEN

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MARION MARLOWE'S ESCAPE

OR

A DANGEROUS MISTAKE ON THE ROAD

BY GRACE SHIRLEY

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Marion Marlowe's Escape;

OR,

A DANGEROUS MISTAKE "ON THE ROAD."

By GRACE SHIRLEY.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE TRAIN.

"All aboard! Albany train on the right! Parlor car in the rear! Come on, folks! Get a move on, the whole lot of you! Just think what a sad and untimely end the world would come to if the Temple Theatrical Company did not strike Cohoes on schedule!"

The speaker, a fine-looking youth of about nineteen years, was hurrying down the long platform of the Forty-second Street Depot toward one of the special trains of the New York Central.

"Hold on, Bert Jackson! We are not going in a parlor car, are we?" called a good-looking young girl, who was running after him.

"That's the way we are going, Miss Ellis! Can't tell how we'll come back!" was the cheerful answer. "The star and her satellites have parlor cars engaged! Property man, calcium man, stage carpenter, scene shifters and 'supes' go in the 'baggage coach ahead,' or in the smoking car! Oh, we're nothing if not tony, my dear Miss Ellis!"

"Any one would think this was Irving's company, to hear you talk, Bert! Why, there are only eighteen of us, all told, without counting the baby!"

"Count the baby, too! Don't take advantage of the innocent—ah, here they come at last, with Miss Marlowe in the lead! Gee whiz! Doesn't she look like a whole basket of peaches?"

"Are we all here?"

Manager Temple asked the question as soon as the hand-shaking was over, and the last member of his company had scrambled aboard the long train.

"All here, brother Temple! I counted

noses!" answered Bert, who had established himself beside the porter to see that the ladies got aboard safely.

"It's the first time in the history of the stage that a theatrical company, or the biggest part of it, traveled in a parlor car, and an observation car at that! Much obliged for your generosity, Jackson," said the manager, as he came nearer.

"Oh, we'll come back afoot to make up for it," said Bert, laughing; "but, of course you can't expect such a bright and shining star as Miss Marlowe to scintillate in an ordinary coach, old man, and besides, it is Marion's first trip around the country, and I want her to enjoy it."

"You are the 'angel' of the company, so what you say goes," answered Mr. Temple, laughing. "For your sake, I hope we have a phenomenal tour. I'd like to bring you back a famous actor."

"What!—and queer me for the pulpit? Not on your tintype, Mr. Temple! My newly acquired governor is determined that I shall be a parson. Just please bear that in mind, and let me travel 'incog.' Call me John Brown or George Washington—anything but Bert Jackson!"

"All right, my boy!" was the answer, as the manager mounted the steps. "I've promised Dr. Brookes to bill him as Michael D'Angelo, so I'll run you in anything you wish, so long as you choose a dead man who won't sue me for libel!"

"Oh, by the way, Temple, just a word with you, please, before we go in," said Bert, suddenly. "Who the deuce is this fellow, Preston, that you've engaged as leading man? I watched him every day at rehearsals, and I must say I don't like him!"

Mr. Temple looked at him quickly before he answered. There was an expression in his eyes as if he quite agreed with the sentiment.

"Oh, he's all right!—a little peculiar, but a rattling good actor! You'll like him better when you get acquainted with him."

"No I won't! I've heard too much about him! I believe he's a 'snake in the grass,' Temple, and if you knew me better you would know that I didn't often make such statements."

"I don't blame you, Jackson. He's not prepossessing; but all we've got to do is to keep our eyes open, and, really, I don't see what damage he can do, even if he is tricky."

They had entered the car by this time, so Bert did not answer. The object of their remarks was seated in one of the chairs, which Bert noticed at once was facing Miss Marlowe.

"Oh, Mr. Temple!" called out Miss Ellis, the ingenue of the company; "I see by the paper that there is another theatrical company in Cohoes to-night! How in the world will they manage it when there is only one theatre?"

"What company is it?" asked Mr. Temple, quickly, while the others turned eagerly and listened.

"Great Cæsar's ghost! It's Miss Lemarid herself!" almost screamed Miss Ellis, as she glanced at the paper. "It is our old 'star,' Mr. Temple—the one you ousted to make room for Miss Marlowe! She's got a new company, and they are playing 'Leah, the Forsaken'!"

"And we open in 'True Hearts.' Well, we'll win hands down," said Mr. Temple, thoughtfully; "but I can't for the life of me see where she'll play. My advance agent booked us for the Oneida to-night—no mistake about it!"

The girls had all seated themselves now, and Bert went over and stood by Miss Marlowe.

She was a beautiful girl, with magnificent gray eyes and a wealth of chestnut hair, and, as this was her first trip about the coun-

try, her face was fairly radiant with anticipation.

"Oh, I know we are going to have a glorious time, Bert," she said, as she removed her hat and leaned back upon the luxurious cushions with a smile.

"Just think!" she continued; "we will visit a dozen cities, and, so far in my whole life, I have seen only one. Oh, I do hope, for all our sakes, that this round tour will be successful!"

"You can make it that alone, Marion," remarked Bert, gallantly. "The brilliant star of the Temple Theatrical Company is all that is needed to bring in the natives from far and near, and corral the residents of both highways and byways! Why, if our advertising man has done his work properly, we shall need no other booming than the name of 'Marion Marlowe,' for already your fame has spread from pole to pole, and is at the present moment echoing in the unfathomable spaces between the less luminous orbs of the solar system!"

"Oh, Bert, do stop! You are not the bugler for the company!" laughed the young girl. "I'll ask Mr. Temple to send you on ahead after this. A little of your oratory on a bill-board would 'boom' us splendidly!"

"Can't you go out and give the engine a push, Bert? I'm just dying to get out of this stuffy old station!" called out a stylishly-dressed young woman just at that moment.

"In a hurry to earn your laurels, Miss Allyn?" retorted the youth. "Let's see, you are the 'leading lady,' aren't you? Well, your 'weigher-in' is a corker at drawing on his imagination! You'd make a better ghost, in my opinion!"

"Thanks awfully," said Alma Allyn, with a jolly laugh. "I'm a trifle pale, I admit, but you'd look so yourself if you had stayed awake all night so as not to oversleep in the morning and then committed a thousand words to memory before eating your luncheon."

"Did you do that, Alma?"

It was Marion who spoke. She swung her chair around, so that she looked at Miss Allyn.

"I came pretty near doing it," said Miss Allyn, honestly. "Really, Marion, you can say what you will, the responsibility of my new position is perfectly awful! I've been a newspaper reporter for years, and it didn't make a wrinkle, but a week's rehearsing to be an actress has driven me gray-headed!"

"And I've taken to drink!" called out a jovial voice from a chair across the aisle.

A handsome young man of aristocratic bearing was just taking a glass of ice-water from the porter, and, as he spoke, every member of the company laughed gayly.

"So long as you don't drink anything stronger, I guess the dissipation won't hurt you, doc; but here we go at last!" cried Bert, with a war whoop.

"Dear me! Where is the baby?" asked Miss Allyn, suddenly. "That blessed child is my only salvation! Every time I begin to shiver over the prospects of this terrible 'first night' I look at that cherub and wonder how she stands it. If she has been on the stage a year, I guess I can endure it for a month; but then, stage children are wonders—I always admired them."

"Ruby is one," said Marion, laughing and showing her white, even teeth. "She inherits her histrionic talent from her mother, I guess, and Mrs. Burnside is a splendid 'first old lady,' isn't she, Alma?"

"Hush! Don't let her hear you!" cried Bert, warningly. "It's bad enough to be the ingenue or soubrette, but imagine calling a gushing young thing like Mrs. Burnside a 'first old lady'!"

"You'll get used to our stage technique after a while, Jackson," laughed the manager,

who had just come back from seeing the rest of his company comfortable.

"Oh, here's the baby!" cried Miss Allyn, as a flaxen-haired child came along the aisle, holding tightly to her mother's hand. "Do give her to me, Mrs. Burnside! I must have her near me! I tell you, if it wasn't for Ruby I'd flunk completely!"

"Oh, Alma! And leave us in the lurch!" cried Marion. "Why, just think how important you are in the cast, and Mr. Temple has not provided an understudy for you."

"Well, I wish he'd get one, and an understudy, too," said Miss Allyn, sighing. "In fact, nothing would suit me better than to be surrounded with them."

"Why are you so nervous?" asked Miss Ellis, smilingly.

"Don't know," said Miss Allyn, honestly; "only it's out of my line. I've spent my life in writing up tragedies, but not in playing them."

"Oh, but that is heaps better than having them in actual experience," laughed Miss Ellis. "But I've been told you have to feel them in order to be a great artist. Why, when Miss Marlowe plays tragedy you would honestly think she was feeling them."

"I do feel them," said Marion, softly; "and sometimes they harrow me up terribly. I have frequently had a nervous headache after a performance."

"Marion has experienced a few tragedies in her short life," said Miss Allyn, with a fond glance at the young girl. "Her life since she came from the country has been nothing but tragedy. She has had more blood-curdling experiences to the square inch than any other woman in creation."

"I guess that is right."

Dr. Brookes spoke slowly, in his rich, manly voice. He had left his chair and was standing by the window just back of Marion.

The beautiful star of the company glanced up as he spoke, and her rosy cheeks flushed a little deeper as she caught the look that was being bestowed upon her.

"My life has not been very serene, I'll admit," she tried to say, gayly; "but sometimes I think my 'tragedies,' as Alma calls them, are a judgment upon me. I was always longing for excitement when I lived at home in the country."

"Oh, Miss Marlowe, did you come from the country?" asked Mrs. Burnside.

Marion smiled at her recollections as she answered the question.

"I am from Hickorytown, Connecticut," she said, very softly. "It is a stupid little place—all hills and valleys, with absolutely nothing in it to interest one except cows and chickens. I was always longing to get away from it, but I don't know—perhaps it would have been far better if I hadn't."

A wistful look had crept into her great, gray eyes, and, as the train flew on, she turned and gazed thoughtfully out of the window.

"We are very glad you didn't stay buried alive in the country," spoke up Alma Allyn, quickly. "Why, Marion, your career will make history yet! You came among us like a comet, and you have been scintillating ever since!"

"And perhaps some day I shall go out like a comet—a puff, a whiff of smoke, and then, total oblivion."

The young girl spoke so tragically that for a moment her friends all stared at her. There was a thrill in her voice that sounded ominous.

If they had known her better they would have been even more alarmed, for Marion was rarely wrong in her intuitions.

As she spoke a sudden darkness had swept over her brain, and with the horror of many thrilling experiences to explain her premonitions, she knew instantly that something

awaited her in the future—something that would in all probability surpass all her previous adventures.

CHAPTER II.

BERT'S PLAIN STATEMENT.

Bert Jackson was the first to recover from the spell cast over them by Marion's words. Bert was irrepressible; nothing could dampen his spirits for more than a minute.

"There will not be any tragedies in this trip, unless we make them ourselves," he said, laughing, "and, as things stand now, there is no danger of that. Why, Dr. Brookes is the 'villain,' and we all know he is harmless; and, so far, there is nobody even jealous, although of course that's because we haven't got acquainted yet! Why, I expect to be the object of a dozen affections soon. Then it's very probable that the atmosphere will be a trifle squally!"

There was a general laugh at Bert's conceit, but he was so frank in his admission that no one dreamed of taking him seriously.

"I expect to be your first victim," said Miss Ellis, mischievously.

She was a pleasant-looking girl and a very jolly member of the company, as well as a clever, all-around little actress.

"Preston isn't saying a word," remarked Bert, turning to the "leading man" of the company. "He's been sitting there ever since the train started, with his gaze fixed on Miss Marlowe's face, as though he wanted to eat her. Have a sandwich, old man, and perhaps it will take the edge off! As the chaperone and general custodian of the company, I must protect the members!"

"Oh, Bert! How can you!" came in a shocked tone from Marion.

Percy Preston scowled and looked out of the window, but Alma Allyn came to the rescue in her usual breezy manner.

"Mr. Preston likes peaches and cream as well as you do, Bert," she said, promptly; "and being a man of taste, he naturally likes to look at Marion. Oh, I'll wager we'll have tragedies enough if you don't curb that tongue of yours, young man! Why, don't you know that it doesn't always do to be too observing?"

"Beg pardon for living!" remarked Bert, obligingly. "Sorry I mistook Preston's admiration for hunger, but, between you and me, Marion is out of sight, isn't she? Why, everybody in the car is staring at her!"

"Then they ought to have a lesson in manners," said Miss Allyn, promptly, as she raised the little girl in her lap so that she could look out of the window.

"How wiggley the car goes," observed the child, very sedately. "It makes my head bob around awful funny, Miss Allyn. Oh, mamma, do look at that big fat man wiv the wiskers!"

"Hush, Ruby!" whispered her mother. But she had spoken too late; every person in the car had heard her and was laughing.

The "big fat man with the whiskers" joined in the laugh, and the next moment he was beckoning to Ruby to come and sit with him.

The child gave a quick look at her mother and then slid down from Miss Allyn's lap.

"There! I told you so!" cried Bert. "The tragedies are beginning! The 'big fat man with the whiskers' has won Ruby's young affections, no doubt with one eye upon Ruby's mother. That means that I had better get on my war-paint and feathers at once, and get after that old fellow's scalp—I mean his whiskers."

"Be careful, Jackson! That may be the Mayor of Cohoes!" whispered Mr. Temple, softly. "Don't rile him up, my boy, or he might queer our show. Remember, we play a one-night stand in nearly every village in creation, so it won't do to be taking chances with the natives."

"Oh, I just tremble to think of it!" cried Miss Allyn, holding up both hands. "Do, Bert, please get me a drink of water! Just fancy! we are due at seven-forty-five and the curtain rises at eight. Why, it's just rushing on to doom with one's eyes wide open! The very thought of facing an audience sends the cold chills down my back! Can't you sympathize with my feelings a little, doctor?"

"I can, indeed!" said Dr. Brookes, laughingly. "For a man whose steady hand has wielded bone-saws and scalpels successfully, I seem to have degenerated to a numbskull that is shaking with palsy! Oh, I expect the strain of this experiment will bring me down in sorrow to my grave! I shall go back to New York a wreck after my month's vacation!"

"Thanks!" said Miss Allyn, calmly. "That makes me feel better! Once let me feel that some member of the company, even though he be the villain, shares my misery, and I shall find the courage to do and dare, to scorn the ignominy of base defeat, and, in the transports of genius hitherto unguessed, perhaps I shall even mount the ladder of fame to victory!"

"You will, if you go up in that tone of voice!" cried Bert, admiringly. "Oh, you are getting on all right, my dear. That ten thousand dollar accent will catch them! If you'll say that over again I'll give you a nickel!"

"I couldn't," said Miss Allyn, dropping back into her ordinary voice. "My outbursts of genius only last for a minute. Do you think, young man, that I could keep that up forever?"

"Well, for the sake of the audience, I should hope not," was the cool answer. "Why, talk about histrionic ability, you have it to burn! You are a regular thoroughbred barn-stormer, Miss Allyn."

"I don't know exactly what that means, but it's all right," said Miss Allyn, sweetly; and just then the conductor came up to them to collect their tickets.

"We are too poor to pay fares, sir," said Bert, looking up at him, solemnly. "We are just starting out on the road to fame. Can't you take a matinee on the train to pay for our transportation?"

"But this road doesn't lead to fame," laughed the conductor, good-naturedly. "We only go to Buffalo by the way of Albany."

"Just my luck!" sighed Bert, dropping into his chair, while the manager of the company handed over the tickets.

As the manager pointed out his people the rest of the passengers in the car stared at them curiously.

"They think we are a lot of jays and yaboos," said Bert, under his breath. "Dashed if I wouldn't like to go through the car and smash some of their phizzes!"

"And we are such an eminently proper lot of people," remarked Miss Allyn. "Why, who ever heard of a theatrical company like ours! Outside of perhaps three or four, there's not a 'professional' in it!"

"And some of them are only professionals by courtesy," retorted Bert, staring straight at Percy Preston.

"What the deuce do you mean?" exclaimed the actor, angrily. "You seem determined to have fun with me, Jackson, but I'm not in the mood to stand it much longer."

"Pity you haven't a more amiable disposition," retorted Bert.

"Oh, Bert, please don't!" pleaded Marion, again. "Mr. Preston doesn't understand what a tease you are, and, really, your remarks are very uncomplimentary to me, also! Haven't I been on the stage long enough to be a 'professional'?"

"If Miss Marlowe isn't a 'star,' I never saw one!" broke in Miss Ellis.

"She's the most talented woman in the profession," echoed Mrs. Burnside.

"Bernhardt and Modjeska are positively nobodies compared with her! Oh, you put your foot in it that time, Jackson! Better be more careful how you express your opinions!"

It was the manager himself who made the last remark, so Bert took off his hat and apologized profusely.

"Really, my ignorance is pitiful," he said, very humbly. "No doubt the facts in the case are that I don't know good acting when I see it. There's a scene in one of our plays where two 'supes' bring lobster and champagne to the banquet room, and every time I see them I fairly tremble with delight, but when Preston goes ranting all over the stage trying to find 'me lady who is lost,' I——"

"Well, what do you do?"

It was Preston who spoke. He had turned with flashing eyes, and was confronting the speaker.

Bert Jackson put his hands in his pockets and looked him squarely in the eye.

"For one thing, I keep my eye on him to see what he is going to do next," he said, quietly; "and the second thing I do is to swear a vow of vengeance if he doesn't treat her right after he finds her. I am here as a gentleman, and I mean to protect every lady in the company!"

As he finished speaking, he moved his glance from Preston's face and turned it deliberately upon a young girl with flaxen hair and almost ink-black eyes, who was sitting in the last chair, and who, so far on the ride, had not spoken a syllable.

The eyes of every member in the company followed his glance, and in an instant the girl's lids fell and her face paled slightly.

Looking back at Preston, they knew instinctively that there was something behind Bert's extraordinary words, for the leading man's face was almost crimson and his wavering eyes looked undeniably guilty.

Marion Marlowe paled as she took in the situation, but she rose in a second and put her hand on Bert's shoulder.

"That is right, Bert! Always champion the ladies, and begin right away, please, by ordering some supper! I'll starve in ten minutes, so tell the porter to hurry!"

CHAPTER III.

A HIDEOUS SUGGESTION.

As the train slowed up at Peekskill, Mr. Temple rose from his chair.

"Let's get off here a minute and stretch our legs, Preston," he said, as he laid his hand on his leading man's shoulder.

As the two passed her chair Marion glanced up at them.

Percy Preston was looking at her sharply, as though he was trying to read her thoughts to see what impression Bert's words had made upon her.

"Did you know Preston before he joined the company, Miss Lee?" asked Miss Ellis of her striking-looking companion, and lowering her voice, carefully.

Miss Ellis, the ingenue, was full of curiosity, but her interest was always on the harmless order.

"I played with him one season in the West," was the hesitating answer. "That was five years ago, long before he reached the dignity of leading man. At that time he was exactly what Mr. Jackson just mentioned, a 'barn-stormer,' or 'ham-fatter,' as we used to call them."

"Have you been on the stage long?" was the ingenue's next question

Miss Lee pointed to little Ruby, who was still talking to the owner of the whiskers.

"Since I was her age," she said, wearily; "and I am twenty now. That's long enough to make me a professional, isn't it?"

"Oh, you are thinking of what Bert just said," laughed Miss Ellis. "Why, that boy

was only joking! You don't understand him yet! Bert would never dream of hurting any one's feelings!"

"I am not so sure," said the soubrette, quickly. "He made Preston as mad as a hornet, and he'll live to regret it! Percy has an ugly temper when any one arouses it."

"You know him pretty well, I should judge," remarked Miss Ellis, slyly.

"Oh, fairly well! I couldn't be six months in the company with him and not know something about him, could I?" asked Miss Lee, promptly. "But it's a mystery to me what Mr. Jackson meant. He looked straight at me, so I am sure he meant something."

"I guess not," said Miss Ellis, vaguely, and then she stopped talking. She was just honest enough herself to look for honesty in others, but she had looked in vain for this trait in her companion. The very tones of Pearl Lee's voice told plainly that she was lying.

"Off again!" cried Bert, coming back into the car; "and supper is on the way, so don't despair, Marion."

Percy Preston and Mr. Temple were right behind him. The actor did not sit down, but passed on through the forward cars to the smoker.

"Come and have a cigar, Jackson!" called the manager, pleasantly.

"Thanks, I don't smoke!" said Bert, as he dropped into the chair facing Marion. "I'm possessor of almost every other vice you might mention, but smoking is the limit—it's a heathenish practice; gives me the hypo and jim-jams every time I think of it!"

The manager laughed and went on without him. He was just a little puzzled by this new acquisition to his company.

"Queer sort of chap," he said to Preston, when he joined him. "They tell me he is an orphan, brought up on a 'poor farm,' and only lately adopted by a very wealthy gentleman."

"They might better have left him on the poor farm," said Preston, hotly. "He's an impudent puppy and bound to make trouble, Temple!"

Manager Temple gave his leading man a sharp glance from under his brows. He was considerably disturbed by the recent unpleasantness.

"Pshaw! What trouble can he make?" he asked, indifferently. "He's not favored by Miss Marlowe, and she's the bright particular star in your horizon, Preston; so what does it matter what he says about the others?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter, only it's annoying," said the actor, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Of course, I know that he is not my worst enemy. Dr. Brookes is in love with Miss Marlowe, and he's rich and a gentleman. Not much hope for a poor actor on a salary, eh, Temple?"

He glanced keenly at the manager as he spoke, but Mr. Temple evaded him. He had turned his head and was looking out of the window.

"Marion Marlowe is not a moth to 'be caught by glare,'" he said, slowly. "She is as true as steel to the noble impulses of her nature. When she honors a man with her love it will not be because he is rich. She is the bravest, the sweetest and the noblest girl I know of!"

The actor turned and looked at him squarely now.

"So I have another competitor in the field, I see!" he said, quickly. "Oh, well, 'misery loves company'! I don't mind you, Temple! Furthermore, I don't seem to object to the doctor; but that whipper-snapper from the poor farm—well, I'd like to annihilate him at once, and completely!"

"Well, that is easily done," said the man-

ager, laughingly. "You can wait until we leave Cohoes after the performance to-night and then lure him out on the back platform and pitch him over."

He said the words without once thinking how they sounded, or that there was the slightest danger of their being taken seriously.

"That might do in the 'wild and woolly West,'" said Preston in a curious voice; "such deeds are done frequently on the other side of the Rockies, but in the centre of civilization"—here he laughed a trifle nervously—"why, the perpetrator would be caught, tried and railroaded to Sing Sing before the train went back to recover the body."

"Unfortunately, justice is not so prompt in our boasted civilization," said Mr. Temple, more seriously. "Men commit murder as openly in New York as they do in any part of the country, and the strangest thing about it is that the more openly it is done the harder it is to trace it. My advice to a murderer would be, don't try to conceal anything."

"I believe you are right," said Preston, thoughtfully. "Still, a man would hardly care to take any chances. I'm a believer in luck, and luck has always been against me."

"I'm not so sure."

The manager spoke softly.

Percy Preston was his friend, but it was a friendship of short acquaintance. He had reasons just now for wishing to know him better—in fact, he would have been glad to have probed into his past a little.

"What do you mean? Have I ever had a stroke of what you could call luck since you have known me, Temple? I've had work, yes—lots of it; but what a time I have had trying to corral my remuneration!"

"I didn't know the last part of it," said Mr. Temple, more interestedly. "I only knew that, whereas five years ago you were positively unknown, you are now basking in the sunlight of an excellent reputation. Anyway, your star is in the ascendant now. You have a chance to take front rank as an actor, and, besides, you are free to win a beautiful woman; the field is fair, and, so far, there has been no favor. Miss Marlowe is heart-whole and fancy free—of that I am certain."

Percy Preston listened intently, with his eyes fixed on the speaker. He was trying to determine if the words held a covert insinuation. But the manager's face baffled him; he could not read it.

"Then I'll take my chances," he tried to say calmly; "and Heaven help the man who crosses my path! I'll take no chances with him, I tell you, Temple!"

There was a silence of a minute, and then the manager changed the subject.

"What do you think of that notice of Lemadrid's appearance in Cohoes?" he asked, suddenly.

Preston calmed himself with wonderful rapidity.

"It looks as if the villainess was still pursuing you," he said, promptly. "I hear that Lemadrid never forgave you for turning her down! As if any manager would not have done the same to get a star like Miss Marlowe!"

"I don't know what to think of it," said the manager, honestly. "There's only one theatre that I know of in Cohoes, and that's the Oneida. Barton booked us two weeks ago, so there's no chance for Lemadrid."

Percy Preston turned his head and glanced out of the window.

"Unless your advance agent is tricky," he suggested, indifferently.

Mr. Temple started. He had thought of something.

He would have spoken his thoughts, but something interrupted.

"I say, Mr. Temple," called out the stage-manager at that minute, "do you happen to

know anything about the dressing-rooms at the Oneida? Bill, here, says that the star's accommodations are about the size of a dry-goods box, and I was just wondering how Miss Marlowe would be apt to take it!"

"Miss Marlowe differs from some stars in that particular," was the manager's answer. "She'll adapt herself to circumstances while she's on the road, like the rest of us. That's the beauty of having a star without a 'swelled head.' There'll be no scrapping among the ladies in this company, Palmer!"

"That lets me out," answered the stage-manager, laughing. "I can stand almost anything but those dressing-room rows! Why, the girls in my last road company nearly drove me crazy!"

Mr. Temple rose from his seat and went to his stage-manager, leaving Preston still smoking and staring out of the window.

If he could have guessed his leading man's thoughts he would have been amazed, but there was nothing in the gloomy face that gave him an inkling of them.

But Percy Preston was turning over in his mind what the manager had said.

He was as deeply and desperately in love with Miss Marlowe as it was possible for a man of his nature to be, and he had not hesitated to demonstrate that fact during the week of rehearsing.

Thus far in his life he had allowed nothing to thwart his wishes, particularly if those wishes were directed toward the favor of a woman, and just now, although he was facing a dangerous experiment, he did not intend that his plans should be frustrated.

How much the manager knew, or whether he knew anything at all, he could not decide; but one thing was certain, Bert Jackson was on his track—his words had proved that fact conclusively. Now the question was, how much had he discovered?

The more he brooded over it the uglier and more determined he grew. His nature was one that could not brook defeat, and long before his cigar was finished he was fairly beside himself with fury.

Whatever Bert knew he was sure to tell it. He must be silenced at once—even if it had to be done by desperate measures.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE.

While Bert was waiting for their supper, he put on his hat and strolled out on the rear platform.

He was a great admirer of scenery, and it was his first trip up the Hudson.

Although the day had been mild, the sky was almost lead-colored. The sun, however, was beginning to peep through, near the horizon.

As he stood enjoying the sunset he was joined by the calcium man, Dick Hinton, who had come into the parlor car in search of the manager.

"See here, Jackson, you are not going to get me into trouble by repeating that yarn that I told you in New York, are you?" he began the moment he saw him. "I was two-thirds 'jagged,' or I wouldn't have told it. Preston wouldn't do a thing to me if he thought I ever knew it!"

"But it is true, you said," replied Bert, with a sharp glance. "If it is true, why do you care what Preston thinks about it?"

"He'll queer me with the manager if he finds out that I know him," said Hinton, sullenly. "The story was true, all right. I don't lie, even when I'm in liquor. Preston is the man I knew as Frank Percy way out in Arizona. He was a tough and a crook, as well as an actor, and now he's got the nerve to be sweetening on Miss Marlowe!"

"He can't help that, and it won't hurt her," said Bert, quickly. "Miss Marlowe can take care of herself, all right, or, if she can't,

there are plenty of us to take care of her. The one I am thinking of is the little blond fairy, she of the chocolate eyes and flaxen hair. By the way, old man, how does she do that, anyway?"

"Do what?" asked the calcium man in some mystification.

"Why, wear eyes like a coon and hair like an Albino! There's something wrong in that combination, Hinton! There's no peroxide in the world that will account for that mix-up! Why, I catch myself singing coon songs every time I look at her!"

"Well, she's a rarity. I've noticed that myself," said Dick Hinton, "and sometimes I can't help wondering how she got into the company. Of course, Preston and the manager have been friends for some time, and, if reports are true, they've been through a good deal together. There was Lemadrid—you remember her, perhaps; Miss Marlowe took her place the night she went to pieces. Well, she was the sort of woman that Temple liked. I can't get it through my head how he ever switched off, unless it is true what they say—that Miss Marlowe has reformed him."

"It wouldn't be the first, nor the most wonderful reformation, that she has ever effected," said Bert, rather solemnly. "Marion Marlowe is a girl who carries good influence with her. No one can know her very long without wanting to take a fall out of themselves or else get off the earth altogether. There's something in her face that makes a fellow feel mean for fear he has done something at some time that she will get onto."

"Say, do you know what I think you are, young man?" asked Dick Hinton, suddenly. "I think you are head-over-heels in love with Miss Marlowe!"

"If there's a man in this company that isn't, I'd like to see him," said Bert, coolly. "Why, I suggested to the manager before we left New York that I'd like to add a few more names to the cast and then write a play for the lot and call it 'Marion Marlowe's Lovers'!"

There was a step upon the platform, and the manager came out. He had a cigar between his fingers, which he tossed over the railing.

"Do you know, Jackson, I'm getting nervous," he said, in a laughing tone. "The conductor was just telling me that they've been having some freshets up the country. There are two or three bridges that are mighty suspicious."

"But they are having them attended to! I heard the governor say so!" said Bert, quickly. "My adopted parent is one of the directors of the road, you know, Mr. Temple. I asked him if his blooming old road was safe before we left the city."

"And what did he say?" asked Mr. Temple, anxiously.

"Oh, he said it was safe enough for anybody's son but his," laughed Bert; "but, then, you see I'm 'a little tin god on wheels,' in his estimation! He has an idea in his head that I am bound to die early."

"He don't know you," remarked the calcium man, with a good-natured slap on the shoulder. Then he told the manager his errand and started back toward the smoker.

The moment he disappeared Mr. Temple put his hand on Bert's shoulder.

"He may be right, Jackson," he said; "and anyway, I don't blame him for thinking so. You are one chap in a thousand! I haven't forgotten your kindness!"

"Oh, rats! Don't make so much of it, old man!" said Bert, almost blushing. "I told you I was going along as the company's 'angel,' and all you need to do is to let me hold down the job—or, in other words, let me know if we are in danger of being stranded. I don't mean that this tour shall fall through for the want of a little money."

"Exactly what Dr. Brookes told me before we started," said Mr. Temple, lighting another cigar. "With two rich actors in my cast who are inclined to be philanthropic, I can't see why we shouldn't have a great trip in spite of our rivals. By the way, I don't mind telling you, Jackson, I'm deucedly anxious about Barton. He's the advance agent, you know, and he's a tricky fellow. If there should be any slip-up about that theatre at Cohoes, I'd be as mad as a hornet."

"Don't cross bridges until you come to them," said Bert, consolingly. "But I do hope our advertising man is O. K. We'll need booming, old man, before this trip is over!"

"Barton attends to that," said Mr. Temple, still dubiously; but after a puff or two at his cigar he brightened up a little.

"Preston is a good actor, in spite of his bad temper," he said, hopefully; "and, as for Miss Marlowe, she is simply splendid! Of course, Miss Allyn is an unknown quantity as yet, but if you are as good a comedian on the stage as you are off, the thing will go through without much pushing."

"You flatter me, Mr. Temple, but I'll try and take it modestly," laughed Bert. "If you've got the nerve to introduce me to the public, I'll make my bow. There's no end of gall in my composition!"

"And talent, too, my boy," was the honest reply. "Of course it's an experiment that most managers would not risk—that is why I hate so awfully to have it a failure."

"There's no such word in my dictionary," said Bert, stoutly. "It's just this way with me: I'm on my vacation; I've got to go to college in the fall, but this is my play-time. Now, if dad has seen fit to blow me off handsomely, there's no law in the world to prevent my blowing other people, and—well, I don't think I'd take kindly to walking on the rails! No, we'll go back in as good shape as we came if the natives won't have us, Mr. Temple."

"Thank you, Jackson! You're a brick!" said the manager, gratefully; "but what I was going to say is this: If there is really any truth in that report about Lemadrid, I have great hopes that Howard Everett will help us. I forgot to tell you that he is to be at Cohoes to-night. Knowing how much he admires Miss Marlowe, I wrote him of our night at the Oneida. A bouquet over the footlights is a good 'ad,' you know, and Everett won't do a thing but buy out every florist in Cohoes! Then, again, Barton doesn't know him from the man in the moon, but Everett knows him, and ten to one he'll keep his eye on him."

"And Everett is a shrewd one! He'll know how to handle any crookedness that he happens to see!" broke in Bert, enthusiastically.

"I don't want to begin with trouble at the start," said Mr. Temple, slowly. "It is bound to come; there is no 'road tour' without it. In fact, I saw symptoms of it in the car just now—and trouble is apt to mean bad business, Jackson."

"I expect I started it," said Bert, a little sorrowfully; "but, between you and me, I couldn't help it. If it comes, I'll try to bear the brunt, Mr. Temple."

CHAPTER V.

THE MANAGER'S WARNING.

There was another step upon the platform, and both gentlemen looked around.

Marion was standing in the door, with a heavy jacket thrown over her shoulders, her beautiful eyes fixed upon the sunset.

"It reminds me of the sunsets at home," she said, sweetly. "Every night when I went for the cows I used to stop on the brink of the hill behind father's farm to watch it. Oh, such a miserable little girl as I was in those days! Would you believe it? I did nothing but pine and pine for a life in the great city—for fame and fortune!"

She laughed merrily as she spoke, and Bert joined in her merriment.

"Little did we dream in those days that we would be racing through the country on parlor cars, with an impatient world awaiting our coming," he added, pompously.

"I tell you, Marion, you and I are dandies! I'd give a dollar if Matt Jenkins could see us!"

"Matt Jenkins was the overseer of the poor farm where Bert was brought up," explained Marion, candidly. "He was an awful brute, so Bert's remark is excusable. Why, his eyes

must pop out of his head if he reads the papers—and I intend that he shall, for I shall send every one of them to Hickorytown."

"Yes, and we'll send a batch of your next pictures," chimed in Bert again. "Oh, I'm just dying to show them what Marion has done! Just think, Mr. Temple; she came straight from a farm, and here she is on the high road to fortune!"

"And happiness, I hope," said Mr. Temple, gently.

Marion blushed a little, but she answered decidedly:

"I should be an ungrateful girl if I wasn't, Mr. Temple! Why, just see how many good friends I have! Really, I cannot understand how I ever got them!"

"Oh, it's your abuse that wins us," said Bert, dramatically. "You pierce our hearts with your poisoned spears and then laugh at our agony while we suffer and adore you."

Marion slammed the door and went back into the car. She wanted to show her disgust at Bert's form of raillery.

"A beautiful girl! She grows more beautiful every time I look at her," murmured Mr. Temple, musingly.

"Poor fellow! Have you got it as bad as that?" asked Bert, condolingly. "Let me advise you to wear green goggles, old man! At that rate of speed you'll lose your eyesight directly."

Mr. Temple laughed and then came back to the subject of their conversation before Marion appeared to them.

"Yes, I've seen trouble enough on the road, I can tell you, Jackson, and we are bound to find it waiting for us in some of the little Western towns. That is why I don't want it at the very beginning. How would you like to strike a town when you are dead tired out and find that the only hotel in the town won't take you; or, how would you like to get to the theatre ten minutes before the time for the curtain to rise and find it as dark as a pocket and as cold as Greenland? Then again, I've struck a town where I expected big business and found that my advance agent hadn't stuck up a single poster, with the result that my actors had to face empty benches."

"I'd call that hard luck," said Bert, who was getting interested.

"Well, I've called it worse than that," said the manager, dryly. "Why, many's the time I've had to hire a brass band to go tooting around the streets to let the people know we were with them; and besides all this, there is always the deuce to pay in a company when things go wrong. The leading man gets full and the star has hysterics, and ten to one the calcium gives out and part of the 'props' are left behind—and, well to sum it all up, it's no life of ease that we find on the road, and it's only fair that you greenhorns should know it."

Bert drew a long breath, but his eyes twinkled merrily.

"So long as we don't have to nail our trunks to the floor and drop out of seventh-story windows to skip our board-bills, I don't mind," he said, gayly; "and I draw the line at being encored with cabbages and rotten eggs! Anything else goes, old man! I'm not a bit fastidious! I depend upon this tour to give me experience. If it gives me anything else, why, I'll be that much the winner."

"You're made of the right stuff! I see I can't scare you," said Mr. Temple. Then he leaned nearer to Bert and lowered his voice a little.

"Look out for Preston, young man! He's got a nasty temper! Sometimes I honestly think the fellow is half crazy. He's a sort of a friend of mine, and, in most things, he's all right; still, I wouldn't try to get his ill-will, unless I had a deucedly good reason."

"But I have a good reason," said Bert, emphatically. "I detest the fellow, and I wish him to know it! So long as he keeps in his place and is nothing but an actor, I shall content myself with snubbing him, but"—here Bert's pleasant voice took on a manly ring—"when I catch him trying to deceive a woman in the company into thinking that he is decent or fit for her to associate with, I'll put a stop to it, you bet, and I won't lose any time about it, either!"

"Why, what do you know about Preston that is detrimental to his character?" asked the manager, wonderingly.

"Only this," said Bert, dropping his voice

still lower, and almost whispering a few words into the ear of his companion.

Mr. Temple looked surprised. Bert's information was news indeed. For a moment he almost doubted the truth of what had just been told him.

"And to think that he should have the nerve to be making love to Miss Marlowe!" Bert finished, excitedly. "Why, if she knew the truth she would loathe the fellow, and yet the rascal hopes to win her affection!"

Mr. Temple recovered himself and tried to speak lightly.

"That's where the shoe pinches, eh, Jackson! You can forgive him a good deal, but not his attentions to Miss Marlowe."

Bert drew himself up with considerable dignity, and his fine boyish features grew uncommonly manly.

"I have known Marion ever since she was born," he said, quietly. "She is as noble as they make them, and as pure as an angel."

"And this other woman that you speak of is Miss Lee?" said Mr. Temple, quickly. "We'll find a way to get rid of her when we get on a little further."

"Hold on!" said Bert, promptly. "Don't be too fast, Mr. Manager! I didn't even hint that the woman was Miss Lee! I've got a problem to solve before you discharge your soubrette, anyway. I want to find out which she is, an octoroon or an Albino!"

Mr. Temple burst out laughing as Bert turned on his heel and left him.

"That kid has some other reason for telling me to go slow," he thought. "Well, I've done my duty. I've warned him of Preston! Now, I wonder if Lenadrid is really at Cohoes! If she is, I may as well throw up the tour! No, I won't! I'll depend on Miss Marlowe to pilot me through to victory!"

CHAPTER VI.

MARION DOES SOME PLANNING.

"What in the world did you mean, Bert?"

Marion asked the question softly, as she and her old friend were eating supper at one of the little tables.

"Exactly what I said," answered Bert, in a low tone. "That fellow Preston is a scamp, and I am going to keep my eye on him. I can't tell you all I know, Marion, but you can rest assured that I will look out for you! The assurance of the fellow to be trying to make love to you!"

"Is he doing that?" asked Marion, mischievously.

"As if you didn't know it!" exclaimed Bert, in fine scorn. "Why, Marion, you've had a dozen lovers to my actual knowledge! You ought to be able to detect the first symptom of the grand passion by this time, and, of course, you do, only you are too modest to own it."

"Let me see," said Marion, demurely; "I did have a lover once, if I remember correctly. It was a small, freckle-faced boy, who used to go bare-legged on my father's farm and help me rake and do the churning and milking. Oh, I haven't forgotten him for a minute, Bert! He has grown into a fine young man, but he loves me just the same, and——"

"You bet he does!" broke in Bert, with his mouth full of chicken. "He thinks more of you than all the rest of your lovers put together! Don't you remember how I told your sister Dollie that I was going to marry you? Well, I meant it, Marion, so you might just as well be prepared! There ain't a galoot in the country that can take you away from Bert Jackson!"

The young girl laughed merrily, but her mirth did not disturb Bert an atom.

"Your assurance is something marvelous. I can't help admiring it, Bert!" she said, gayly. "Where on earth would I be if all the young men were like you?"

"Well, I don't know just where you would be," answered Bert, calmly; "but I know what you would be—you'd be a bigamist, Marion. Let's see, you'd have married Archie Ray first, and Dr. Brookes next, and then there would be Howard Everett and Ed Gordon and old man Merton—and goodness knows how many others!"

"Well, I'm still Marion Marlowe," laughed the fair girl, gayly; "and, in spite of you, Bert, I expect to remain so till the end of the chapter."

Bert was about to reply, when Miss Ellis came up to them.

"Oh, Miss Marlowe!" she began, excited-

ly. "Do you believe in fortunes? Miss Lee has just told mine, and she says there is something awful going to happen. Somebody is in terrible danger! She does not think it is me—so perhaps it is you! Of course, I don't believe a word of it, but it made me so uncomfortable I just had to tell it!"

"Ask Miss Lee to please not let it happen until we have finished supper," said Bert, a little rudely. "People who foretell awful events ought to be gagged or muzzled! As if poor Marion had not had enough awful experiences already!"

"Oh, of course it is only a guess," muttered Miss Ellis, a little humiliated. "I only did it for fun! I don't believe a word of it!"

Marion was looking out of the window with a thoughtful look upon her face.

There was a storm coming up, and it was growing dark, but she could see the shining surface of the river distinctly.

Winter had been slow in coming, and the mild weather of the last few days, which still continued, promised a heavy fall of rain when the storm reached them.

"I've had a feeling ever since we started that something was going to happen," Marion said, slowly. "I don't know what it is, but I do hope it's not an accident. I expect it is, because I heard something said about the freshets having weakened the bridges, but I don't mind about myself. I am only thinking of little Ruby."

"See here, Marion! You are getting morbid!" said Bert, a little sharply. "You've had such a lot of dreadful experiences since you left the farm to seek your fortune that it isn't much wonder, but there's nothing going to happen this trip, for I'm a mascot! We'll land O. K. in Cohoes, and then—hurrah for victory! Why, my head is expanding already with the applause that is coming!"

"You'll be a great success, no doubt about it," said the young girl, smiling. "Still, I can't quite rid myself of my premonitions, Bert. I've had so many of them in my life, and they have all been so truthful!"

"Oh, you've got the premonition habit," laughed Bert. "I hope it isn't catching, for I'd awfully hate to have it. When you begin 'feeling things in your bones,' Marion, you may know it is fatal!"

His companion laughed heartily. There was a good deal of truth in Bert's words, and it was not long before her gloomy spirits vanished.

"Hear this, Jackson! There's trouble ahead!" called out Dr. Brookes, after a minute. "I got an Albany evening paper at the last station. They say it is a fact that the other company is at the Oneida!"

"I sent a couple telegrams from the station," said Mr. Temple, who came in just in time to hear the words. "I'll know at Hudson if there's any truth in the statement."

"In case it is true, what will we do?" asked Marion, quickly.

Mr. Temple shook his head.

"There's nothing else but a hall," he said, with a scowl, "and I'll never consent to play second fiddle to Lemadrid!"

Marion thought a moment and then set her lips firmly.

"I'll plan a way to prevent that, Mr. Temple. This company shall not be disgraced, so long as I belong to it! If we can't get the Oneida, we will not go to Cohoes! A one-night stand does not matter, especially under these circumstances. We'd lose more by playing in a hall than by not giving the performance."

"A great deal more! Why, the injury to our reputation could not be counted!" was the answer.

Marion's face grew thoughtful, and then she smiled brightly. She had thought of a way to outwit Miss Lemadrid; but first, she must wait for the news at Hudson.

Perhaps if the company had been composed of the regular members of the profession she would have hesitated before dreaming of such a serious experiment, but it was composed principally of the friends whom she loved dearest on earth, and she was determined that this tour should be as successful as it was possible to make it.

She had been through far too much to be afraid of danger now, and her eyes shone as she thought of the business end of her project.

It would be the greatest "ad." that the com-

pany could have, and one that would go down unparalleled in the history of the profession.

Then, suddenly, it came to her how it would distress her friends if she really put her plan in execution.

"I'll tell Alma," she decided; "and she can explain afterward. The effect upon the public will be just the same, for, of course, it will be considered a professional secret."

After this she waited calmly for the train to reach Hudson, little dreaming how perfectly her plans were to be carried out, or that she was about to become a victim of the very plot she had laid so smilingly.

CHAPTER VII.

A PECULIAR REHEARSAL.

When Percy Preston came back to the parlor car he found the ladies alone. Miss Marlowe and Miss Allyn were both studying their parts under the electric light, Miss Ellis and Mrs. Burnside were playing cards, and little Ruby was asleep on one end of the sofa.

Miss Lee seemed the only one who was disengaged. She had just finished her supper and was leaning back, wearily.

Sinking into the chair nearest her, the actor spoke indifferently, but with his voice raised a little, so that every one could hear him.

"These long rides are beastly stupid! I'm heartily sick of train life, but what is a man to do? You can't loaf all winter on the Rialto very well! I made a mint of money last year, but I have put it all in a play, 'The Daughter of the Gods.' How does that strike you for a title?"

"First rate. Who wrote it?" answered Miss Lee, mechanically.

"I did, and I expect it will be great!" was Preston's astonishingly candid answer.

Marion Marlowe glanced over her shoulder with an interested look.

"How lovely, Mr. Preston! Do you really write plays? I have wished so often that I was clever enough to write one!"

In an instant the actor was leaning over the back of her chair, while Miss Lee's inky eyes fairly scintillated with anger.

"There is a magnificent part in my play for you, Miss Marlowe," murmured Preston, softly; "the character of 'The Daughter of the Gods, divinely fair' you know. It gives a splendid opportunity for tragedy, of course! There are passages in it that would stir the heart of a statue, if they were spoken in your melodious tones, Miss Marlowe."

The black eyes behind him gleamed a little more ominously, but Marion did not see them, so she only laughed at the actor's enthusiasm.

"I do hope you can get Mr. Temple to try it," she said, honestly; "but, of course, you must give my friends some real nice parts. Miss Allyn, for instance, must be in it, Mr. Preston, and Bert must be the comedian—I am sure he has talent."

A heavy scowl darkened the actor's face, and it was only with some difficulty that he kept her from seeing it.

"Never mind about me! My career will be over in a month!" laughed Miss Allyn, looking up from her manuscript. "I shall distinguish myself the first night by falling all to pieces, but I'll keep going on as long as they stick me together. By the end of the month I'm sure to be way past sticking."

"That's three games out of five! Oh, you are too stupid!" called out Miss Ellis at that minute. "Do come over here, Miss Allyn, and play just one game! I'm so nervous over the storm that I must do something, and Mrs. Burnside has neither eyes nor ears for any one but Mr. Preston! He's hypnotized her, I believe, for she's sat and stared at him ever since he came back into the car! I'm sorry to be personal, but anybody can see it!"

"Oh, Miss Ellis! How unkind!" murmured Mrs. Burnside, without even a blush. "I was staring at Mr. Preston for exactly one reason. He looks like a man I met years ago, way out in the West. I never discovered it until just now, and it upset me completely."

Both remarks had been made good-naturedly, but Percy Preston looked uneasy.

"I hope I'm better looking than he was," he managed to say, finally. "I don't mind looking like some one else, provided he hasn't any creditors."

"I believe you are handsomer, and I hope you are better," said Mrs. Burnside, musing-

ly. "Your moustache is a great improvement. He didn't have any."

"H'm! A rather doubtful compliment," murmured Miss Allyn, under her breath, and, just then, a heavy gust of wind awoke Ruby, and she turned and bent over her.

"Goodness, what a storm!" cried Miss Lee, nervously. "Why, it's as dark as midnight, and it's hardly past sundown!"

"Come out in the vestibule a minute—I want to speak to you."

It was Miss Lee who spoke, and only Preston heard her.

A moment later they met in the vestibule of the car, and, as they faced each other, Miss Lee began talking excitedly.

"I tell you, it's all up with you, Frank," she began. "That fellow Jackson is 'onto you with both feet,' as they say. Now, where in creation did he get his information?"

"Exactly what I am trying to find out," muttered Preston, angrily. "If I thought you had told him, I'd——"

The woman shrugged her shoulders and interrupted him, angrily.

"Ridiculous! As if I would do that until you forced me to, Frank!"

"Well, the little upstart knows something," went on the actor, hardly heeding her; "and there's only one person in the company besides yourself who could tell him."

"And that's Temple?" said the girl, with a questioning glance. "Mrs. Burnside can't have told. She is too vague in her recollections."

"A lucky thing for me," growled Preston, scowling. "I may be mistaken, but I think Jackson knows. Still, what would be Temple's object in giving me away? He's no stickler for anything that does not put dollars in his pocket."

They both stared a moment, but neither could answer the question. Then Miss Lee's inky eyes seemed to soften wonderfully.

"Won't you do what I ask you to, dear?" she urged, softly. "Oh, Frank! This is cruel! Don't you know you are killing me?"

Her lips had grown white as she asked the question, but her words seemed to have awakened a demon in the fellow.

"That's enough of that!" he thundered, furiously. "Don't you dare to begin that pleading again! I've told you once and for all that I love Marion Marlowe. If you interfere with me, it will go hard with you! I've never been thwarted yet, and you'd better not try to thwart me!"

His face was livid and his brow was as dark as the sky outside.

"You'll drive me too far, some day, Frank Percy!"

The girl's voice trembled, and the tears sprang to her eyes, but the words came so swiftly that she could not check them.

The actor clinched one hand and raised it threateningly.

"What will you do, you hussy?" he questioned, furiously. "You had better be careful how you threaten, Pearl Lee! Remember, it will go hard with you if you so much as breathe my secret!"

He was shaking with anger, but the girl faced him unflinchingly.

"You can bully me, Frank, but that sort of thing won't go with this company! Once let me tell what I know, and where will you be? Walking back on the rails, with your reputation ruined forever!"

"You don't dare to tell!"

Preston hissed the words like a maniac.

"I'm not afraid of your tongue, for I know how to curb it! One word from your lips, and it shall be the last! Remember that, Pearl. Remember I have warned you!"

The man was terrible in his anger, so terrible that the girl almost forgot her danger as she studied his features.

No madman's face could have been more distorted, and no fiend could have shown a more diabolical nature.

There was a gust of wind as the door of the car flew open.

"Hello, Preston! What's the matter?" Manager Temple had stepped in suddenly, and caught a glimpse of the two faces.

In an instant a smile overspread the features of Miss Lee. She was by far the quicker of the two to answer his question.

"Oh, like busy bees, we are improving each shining hour," she said, lightly. "Preston and I were just rehearsing the scrap that we have in the fourth act, and, I give you my

word, we can do it true to nature! Why, he glared at me so beautifully that I was positively afraid of him!"

Mr. Temple glanced from one to the other, but Preston was smiling now, so he was completely deceived by the explanation.

"That act will make one of the hits of the evening, I think," he said, enthusiastically. "You see, Miss Marlowe's speech about 'matrimonial felicity' will work them all up to the right pitch, and then, when Jackson points to your scraps, as an instance of 'conjugal love,' it will bring down the house. Don't you think so, Preston?"

Percy Preston scowled at the mention of Jackson's name, and the temptation to let off a little of his wrath was not to be resisted.

"Jackson will queer the whole act, unless I'm much mistaken," he said, savagely. "He's a chump and a boor, and, furthermore, he's a 'greeny!' It's an outrage, Temple, to put him in that scene and, besides, it's an insult to us professionals!"

"Pity you didn't think of that before you signed your contract," remarked Mr. Temple, dryly. "I could have secured Ed Girdon for exactly the same price, and, you know, he's an old stand-by of mine—even Miss Marlowe likes him."

Percy Preston bit his lips. He understood his manager. He shrugged his shoulders and made a brave effort to recover his temper.

"Oh, he may do all right, but you must admit it isn't pleasant! I detest the kid, but, of course, that doesn't matter! It's for you to say who shall be in the cast. I only hope he doesn't make a laughing-stock of us and ruin my reputation."

Miss Lee had slipped away quietly and gone back to her seat, leaving the manager and his leading man facing each other.

"Look here, Temple!" said Preston, with another outburst of rage, "I thought you and I were friends! How does it happen that you could tell Bert Jackson my secrets? I call it a dirty trick, and I believe you did it!" He had straightened himself up, and was fairly glaring at his manager, and the words came so swiftly that they confused his hearer.

"What the deuce do you mean?" asked Mr. Temple, angrily. "How the mischief could I tell what I didn't know? I never heard of your villainous actions until Jackson just told me!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PREMONITION REALIZED.

Percy Preston fairly gasped with astonishment at his words, but the look on Mr. Temple's face proved conclusively that he spoke truthfully. Then Pearl Lee had told! He could think of no other solution. In an instant he was white with rage and mentally swearing vengeance upon her.

"Your bone is with some one else, not me," went on the manager, calmly; "but let me tell you right here, Preston, you would never have signed that contract if I had known your record. Not that I'm the least bit finicky about an actor's morals ordinarily, but the actresses in this company are ladies, every one of them, at least, so far as I know, and that's far enough to make me protect them."

"Do you wish to break the contract?" snarled Preston, angrily.

"Not so long as you behave yourself," was the manager's prompt answer. "You were hired as an actor, and that is all. If you presume to pose as a gentleman and an equal of Miss Marlowe, I will find some way of ridding myself of you!"

"Oh, will you?" sneered Preston. "Well, you'll have a job on your hands! Contracts, my dear Temple, are not broken so easily. You can tell all you know, you and Jackson both, but how will you go to work to prove your assertions?"

"Through Miss Lee."

The answer came as swiftly as a thunderbolt.

Percy Preston turned pale, but he clinched his hands determinedly.

"I defy you!" he fairly roared. "Do you hear, Temple? I defy you!"

Mr. Temple stared at him a minute and then changed his tone a little.

"You do that well—very well, Preston," he said, dryly. "That sort of thing will take with an audience, but, remember, I know you now and it won't go down! Now get out of

my way, or I'll throw you out of the window!"

He put his hand on the fellow's shoulder and pushed him aside. He did not care to have any further words with him at present.

Preston ground his teeth, but he had sense enough to remain docile. When he was left alone he tried to calm himself a little.

"He can't break that contract," he muttered, as he made his way to the smoker; then he began thinking of Pearl Lee and what he felt sure was her treachery.

How much had she told? Not all, surely. He must find a way to silence her at once, before she had proven conclusively what the others were only vaguely surmising.

The train was rushing on now and nearing Hudson. It was as dark as night and the rain was pouring in torrents.

The fury of the elements seemed to calm him a little, so he made his way back through the car where the rest of the company were sitting, and, with only a glance toward Marion, went out on the platform.

The other members of the cast did not give him a thought, apparently, only Pearl Lee paled slightly as he passed, and buried her face behind a paper.

Marion was laughing and chatting merrily and little Ruby was in her lap, gazing up into her face with open admiration.

The young girl was still thinking out her daring plan and was more than once on the verge of divulging it to Miss Allyn, but each time she attempted it, Ruby unknowingly interfered, so she laughed good-naturedly and awaited a better opportunity.

"I do hope we will not have any 'tragedies,' as Bert calls them," she said to Dr. Brookes, laughingly. "A tragedy nearly always means dishonesty of some sort, and I have suffered so much from treachery and deceit! Oh, I don't see why we should not have a delightful trip together!"

"I expect we will," said Alma Allyn, decidedly. "Who in the world could help enjoying such a lark, Marion! It would be vastly different, I fancy, if we had money invested in the enterprise."

"Oh, but we are going to make a financial success, of course," cried Marion, gayly. "Why, we can't help drawing crowds when they hear about us, Alma! All my personal exploits have been aired in the local papers, and while I don't like it at all, still, I know it is necessary in the theatrical world to advertise one's self a little."

"Yes, you've got to 'toot your own horn,'" broke in Dr. Brookes, laughingly. "I've been trying to think if I have ever done anything that is worth recounting—anything that would brand me as a freak or a curio of any kind, and, to tell you the truth, I can't think of a single thing!"

"All of your great deeds have been done quietly," said Marion, sweetly. "I know a few of them, doctor, but I am sure they are not the kind that would draw a crowd. Unfortunately, no one enthuses over quiet philanthropy in the slums of a great city."

Dr. Brookes looked pleased as she smiled at him sweetly.

It was always pleasant to know that this lovely girl appreciated his labors.

"Do you know," she went on, "I am sure we will astonish the country! Why, such plays as ours ought to almost draw by themselves, and then, just think, we have little Ruby, the greatest child actress on the stage at present."

She coddled the child as she spoke, and Mrs. Burnside looked happy. A word of praise from Marion seemed to make every one feel better.

"Me is goin' to be a gweat actwess some day, 'ust like 'oo, Miss Marlowe," lisped the little one, sweetly. "Me is goin' to look pretty in a w'ite dwess, wiv long curls and—and me is goin' to pay wiv a little baby 'ust as oo pays wiv me, and den some nice, big man wiv a gwate gig mufstash is comin' to mawwy me and be happy ever after."

A roar of amusement greeted the child's announcement, and Miss Allyn picked her up and tossed her merrily.

"So you have begun to think of 'nice, big mans' and marriage, already, have you?" she asked. "Oh, well, it's born in you! You can't help it Ruby! That is what it means to be born a woman!"

"Love and marriage seem unavoidable to most of us," laughed Mrs. Burnside. "I expect Miss Marlowe will be caught in the

toils before long; but you seem to have escaped so far, Miss Allyn."

"Yes, I'm the odd one!" replied Miss Allyn, gayly. "When Cupid goes around he always overlooks me, but I'll get square some day! I'll marry in spite of him!"

"You will, if a certain young man I know has his way," said Marion, slyly; "and, by the way, Alma, are we not to see him on this trip? It will be dreadful for you to go a month without a glimpse of him."

"So she hasn't escaped, after all," laughed Mrs. Burnside. "Just see her blush! Why, she must be really smitten! And she's such a business-like girl—I wouldn't have suspicioned it!"

"Well, of all things! As if we business-like people couldn't feel affection!" retorted Miss Allyn. "Why, we are the ones that get it the worst when it comes, but, perhaps, that is because it comes so seldom. Look at Marion, now. She has had dozens of lovers, and yet there's not a name that will bring a blush to her cheeks! I just envy that girl her equanimity of temperament!"

"Is that what you call it? I thought it was just hard-hearted stubbornness," said Marion, half sadly. "I have known such noble men, and yet I could not love them. I adore them as friends, but it never seems to go deeper. Sometimes I wonder if I shall ever really love. It must be perfect bliss! I just envy Alma!"

"Oh, Marion, don't!" cried Miss Allyn, blushing deeper.

The doctor's lips were smiling, but his eyes looked sad as he fixed them in an intent gaze upon Marion's sweet features.

She had spoken plainly, but he had known the truth before, consequently the utter hopelessness of his love did not overwhelm him.

"I am sure you will love, deeply and sacredly, some day," he said, very softly; "and, for your sake, I hope it may come soon, for loving is delightful!"

"Whether one's passion is returned or not, it is beautiful to love. I only hope that I may live long enough to congratulate your accepted lover."

There was a tenderness in his voice that no one could mistake, and for a moment all eyes were turned curiously upon Marion.

"I know one person who will not congratulate Marion's accepted lover," remarked Miss Allyn, quickly. "Bert Jackson won't look upon him in such a Christian spirit! He'd make it hot for him, you bet, and I wouldn't blame him, either! I believe upon my soul I should be jealous myself of Marion's love!"

"Nonsense!"

Marion tried to speak merrily, but she was deeply affected.

The train stopped at Hudson as she made the exclamation.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRAGEDY.

"We are done for! Lemadrid has the Oneida, and Barton is a traitor!"

Mr. Temple made the announcement in a terrible voice, as he came into the car, waving a telegram excitedly.

"The wretch! To sell us to the enemy!" cried Mrs. Burnside, promptly.

"I'd like to horsewhip the rascal!" roared Bert, who had just opened an evening paper. Then he suddenly caught his breath as he noticed a glaring headline. "You were right about those freshets, old man. They have been working fearful havoc up the State," he said, as he glanced down the column; "no end of bridges have been destroyed. I think I'll go and talk to the conductor."

He hurried from the car as he spoke, but the others hardly heeded him. The conditions at Cohoes were considerably more exciting.

"I simply won't hire a hall; that is all there is about it," said Mr. Temple, savagely. "The Oneida is mine, and I'll make a fight for it."

"But suppose it isn't yours! Suppose Barton hired it for Lemadrid," asked Dr. Brookes, eagerly.

"Then the jig is up," said Mr. Temple, dubiously; "and I'd rather take a horsewhipping than be beaten by Lemadrid."

Marion glanced out of the window. It was still very dark. Two storms had evidently met, and the rain beat against the windows incessantly. While the others were talking, she consulted her time-table. There was only one stop before reaching Albany.

It was a simple little scheme that she was planning, but she felt sure that it would do nicely for advertising purposes.

A moment later she saw her chance to speak quietly to Miss Allyn.

"Come out on the rear platform; I want to speak to you, Alma! Wait until I am out and then make it appear casual. I want to consult you before I tell the others what I am planning."

Miss Allyn nodded her head. Neither of them remembered Preston at that moment. If they had been asked to locate him, they would have said he was possibly in the smoker.

Miss Lee's fur cape was lying on a chair and, as Marion rose suddenly, she picked it up and threw it around her shoulders.

"I'm just going for a breath of air and a look at the storm," she said, merrily. "You know, I am from the country, and I positively adore watching the fury of a storm."

"It's wainin' awful hard!" called out little Ruby.

"It won't reach me, darling," called back Marion, over her shoulder; then, something prompted her to turn back and kiss the little one fondly.

"We are a little behind time," said Mr. Temple, at that moment, as he glanced at his watch.

Dr. Brookes drew his timepiece from his pocket, and the two were comparing them when Marion slipped away, her face almost covered with the cape she had confiscated.

A moment later she had reached the door of the car, which she opened with a firm hand and then closed instantly behind her.

The moment her foot touched the platform she saw that she was not alone.

Percy Preston was leaning heavily against the end of the car and, as her arm brushed his shoulder, he turned quickly and faced her.

Marion's eyes were almost hidden behind the folds of the cape, and, as she saw the gleam in Preston's eyes, she seemed transfixed with horror.

"So you betrayed me, you hussy!" he hissed in her ear.

The next second he had seized her with a madman's strength and fairly lifted her in his arms over the railing of the platform.

At exactly that moment the train touched a fragile bridge.

Preston's hand had crept over her mouth now, and he was still holding her in his arms. Marion seemed to know instinctively what was coming.

Just as she caught a glimpse of dark water far, far below her, the madman suddenly swung her out from the rail as far as he could; his grasp was loosened, and Marion felt that she was falling.

The group in the car were still talking excitedly when the train passed in safety over the weakened trestle.

"Thank Fortune! We are over that!" cried Bert Jackson, coming back into the car. "That's the last one, they tell me, between here and Albany."

"I'd give a thousand dollars for a reasonable excuse for not reaching Cohoes tonight," said Mr. Temple, savagely. "Of course, I don't want an accident or anything like that, but if something would only help us to skip that town honorably! I have plenty of time to settle with Barton later!"

Miss Allyn rose just then and started for the door. It was a good time to go out and have her talk with Marion.

"By the way, what's become of Preston?" asked the manager, suddenly. "I haven't seen him for an age! Perhaps he has deserted us."

There was a shriek from the rear of the car that cut short his remark.

Miss Allyn was standing with one hand upon the open door, peering out into the gloom that still rested upon the platform.

"Marion! Where is Marion!" she cried, in alarm. "Mr. Preston is here, lying full length on the platform; but oh! do some one tell me what has happened to Marion!"

There was a rush for the door, every passenger in the car joining. Percy Preston was dragged in, white, limp and unconscious, but there was not a sign of the beautiful Marion.

CHAPTER X.

CLEVER WORK.

For the first ten minutes after this fearful discovery Marion's friends were very nearly frantic.

The train was behind time already; it could not stop a minute, but it slowed up to let Bert Jackson and the doctor off, in order that they might go back and institute a search for Marion.

When Percy Preston recovered consciousness he could only mutter incoherently that Marion had fallen; after that he seemed raving on the verge of delirium. As a precautionary measure, Mr. Temple had him placed under arrest; still, he could think of no motive which the fellow could have for wreaking such a horror on the innocent girl.

At the very next stop the news was flashed to Cohoes.

The Temple Theatrical Company had found a reason for not keeping its engagement at the Oneida.

At Albany, Manager Temple received a telegram which had crossed his own message.

"Worsted Lemadrid! You own the Oneida."

It was signed, "Howard Everett."

The announcement of this victory made Mr. Temple groan. He could think of nothing but the fate of poor Marion.

As he was helping his weak and trembling leading-man across the station, Miss Lee touched his arm and whispered some words to him.

Five minutes later Percy Preston was locked up. Miss Lee's words had come as a revelation.

Mrs. Burnside, Miss Ellis and little Ruby were still weeping bitterly, but Miss Lee was dry-eyed, although there was the pallor of death on her features.

Miss Allyn tried to be calm, but her voice trembled perceptibly. She had been questioning Preston with the shrewdness of a detective.

"I have done all I can."

Mr. Temple made the announcement sadly, as they boarded the local train that was to take them to Cohoes.

"I can't get back to Hudson before nearly midnight, and, of course, it is useless to go, unless I hear from Jackson. We have quarters engaged at Cohoes, so we will go there and wait. If Miss Marlowe is dead, we will disband to-morrow."

"She is not dead! I am sure of it!" cried Alma Allyn, frantically. "I can't believe that Marion is dead! Mr. Preston says the train was barely crawling when she fell over, and Marion is a splendid swimmer—that is why I think she is still living."

"Yes; it happened on the trestle," said Mrs. Burnside, brokenly. "If she did not strike her head in falling, she may escape. Poor girl! Poor Marion! What a fearful experience!"

She bowed her head and wept, and little Ruby joined her. They had only known the young girl a week, but they both loved her dearly.

"There is another express up in an hour or so," said Mr. Temple, thoughtfully. "I have left word at the station to wire me any news they may hear. Can't expect Jackson to wire; he will be too busy."

"Poor Bert! It will kill him! And the doctor loved her so dearly," murmured Miss Allyn, hoarsely.

After that no one spoke until the train pulled in at Cohoes. It was ten minutes to eight, but no one thought of the time. There could be no performance until they heard of Marion.

As Mr. Temple descended slowly to the platform he came face to face with Howard Everett.

In an instant the dramatic critic drew him to one side and whispered something in his ear.

"Hurrah! Marion is safe!"

The manager shouted the words and Everett joined him.

"No use, Everett! Your scheme is a good one, but I can't do it, old man! I'm too overjoyed with the news to think of keeping it quiet!"

"But just think what an 'ad.' it would be!" urged Everett, eagerly; "still, of course, I don't blame you a bit, old chap! You must have been suffering all the tortures of the Inferno!"

Miss Allyn was first to recover from the surprise. She grasped Mr. Everett by the arm and fairly shook him.

"Where is she? Where is Marion? Quick! Tell us everything, Mr. Everett!"

The critic's face beamed as he answered

her questions, with the rest of the company crowding close around him.

"Never mind where she is, she is safe!" he said, gayly. "I tell you, I never hustled so in my life before! I've been on wings since I got that telegram from Jackson! You see, if he had wired me she was lost, I couldn't have moved a finger; but when he told what had happened, and then said she was safe, I saw my chance in a jiffy; and I think as an advance agent I am the greatest thing that ever happened!"

"You are a wonder, old fellow; but what have you done Got rid of Barton, for one thing, but what are the others?" asked Mr. Temple.

"Corralled the Oneida, of course! Lemadrid had it! Barton skipped the minute I made him admit his treachery! But you must hurry, Temple; it is getting late. The theatre is open and your audience is gathering!"

"But we can't play without Miss Marlowe," began the manager, when Mr. Everett stopped him.

"Your curtain will rise a trifle late, I am sorry to say; but it will rise, and that is all that I can promise. You must do the rest. I'm clear used up! I expect a season's offer on account of this, Temple."

"You shall have it," said the manager, still a little bewildered; then he bundled his company into carriages and hurried to the theatre.

There was an enormous crowd standing about the doors, and every one seemed talking about Marion Marlowe.

Everett had certainly spread the news with astonishing alacrity, but there was no time then to ask how he had done it.

The members of the company were feverish with excitement, but they all hurried to their work like well-trained soldiers.

"I've forgotten every blessed word of my part!" called out Miss Allyn, as she directed the porter where to put her baggage. "Talk about 'one night stands!' Why, this one is an eternity, and yet we are giving cards and spades to rapid transit!"

"Are you sure you can do Miss Marlowe's part?" called Mrs. Burnside to Miss Ellis. "I'm sure they must mean for you to do it! Miss Marlowe can't get here; it will be simply impossible!"

"We can't be expected to do anything right to-night," chimed in one of the "supes," who happened to be passing the dressing-rooms. "It's enough to make a man dizzy to think what we've just been through! I don't know which end I'm standing on this blessed minute!"

Inside the dressing-rooms Miss Ellis was daubing grease-paint on her face with one hand, and unbuttoning her dress with the other.

"It doesn't seem possible that she is really, truly safe, does it, Miss Allyn?" she gurgled.

"But she is! she is!" cried Miss Allyn, happily. "Oh, it would have killed me if she wasn't! Poor, darling Marion! Why, if I had the time, I could just weep for joy, Miss Ellis!"

The tears were running down her face as she spoke, and making sad havoc with the cosmetic, but she kept daubing it on with superb indifference.

"We actresses have to hide our feelings, even under such excitement as this," called out Mrs. Burnside, sadly. "How little the public knows how much we suffer! Talk about smiling faces and breaking hearts; we professionals know what they mean, don't we, Miss Ellis?"

"We do, indeed," said the young girl, gravely; then she happened to discover that Miss Lee had vanished.

"Where in the world are you, Pearl?" she called over the transom to the next dressing-room.

Miss Lee's reply came in the form of a question, asked in a voice that was vibrating with anguish.

"Who do you suppose will take Preston's place, Miss Ellis? Is that Mr. Everett an actor? We can't go on without Percy."

"No, he is a dramatic critic, and they can't act a little bit," said Miss Ellis, contemptuously.

"They'll have to let Dr. Brookes play Preston's part, and one of the 'supes' can do the villain. Miss Marlowe is safe, so they'll let Preston off to-morrow! If she had been killed it would be different; but, as it is, they can't hold him!"

"They'll hold him tighter when Marion comes, I am thinking," remarked Miss Allyn, dryly. "There can't any one make me think that he isn't guilty!"

There was a groan from Miss Lee, but no one heard it.

"Quick! girls! Come down! I have something to tell you!" called Mr. Temple's voice from the foot of the stairs.

At the same time there was a burst of music from the orchestra in front. It was the first real signal for the work of the evening.

"It's some news from Marion. I am sure!" cried Miss Ellis, as she started for the stairs. "Oh, if she could only get here on time, but the thing is incredible!"

"She doesn't go on until the second act," chimed in Mrs. Burnside, as she snatched up Ruby and darted out.

"Of course, it is news from Marion! What else could it be!" shouted Miss Allyn, as she almost pushed them to one side in her impatience. "Of course, it is Marion, the darling girl! It would not surprise me a bit if she was here this minute!"

CHAPTER XI.

A GREAT "FIRST NIGHT."

When Alma Allyn appeared upon the stage ten minutes later, in answer to her cue, she was too excited to ever dream of stage fright or "falling to pieces." She spoke her lines in a voice that fairly thrilled the audience, and it was easy for them to guess the cause of her happiness.

Little Ruby followed her, and was being applauded when, to the surprise of those in front, Bert Jackson appeared suddenly before them.

There was no one present who had not heard of Marion's adventure, so his entrance was the signal for an outburst of enthusiasm.

Bert began to blush through his paint and was losing his nerve completely, when Miss Allyn managed to pass close to him and whisper, softly:

"Don't flunk, for Heaven's sake! Just think of all the bragging you have done, Bert!"

Bert pulled himself together and made his bow gracefully. Miss Allyn's words had saved him from going all to pieces.

The next round of applause was for Dr. Brookes, and, as the young man came into the full glare of the calcium, Miss Allyn could hardly restrain her desire to rush forward and embrace him.

How he must have suffered during that period of suspense! It flashed over her now, when there was no chance to even think of it.

Never was a first act played with such vigor and dash. Every actor on the stage seemed on the *qui vive* of expectation.

As the curtain rose upon the second act, the audience sat motionless and hardly breathed. They had heard that Marion was coming, and all were eager to see her.

There was a perfect volume of music as the young girl appeared, as serene and smiling as though nothing had happened.

For just a second no one quite knew what to do. Then, some one called her name in a ringing voice, and then a cheer went up that fairly shook the building.

Marion bowed like a queen as they cheered and applauded. It seemed like a dream to her—that hideous adventure.

Two hours before she had been flung from a train, over a threatening trestle, down into deep, dark water.

But here she stood with the blaze of light about her, and hundreds of eager lips shouting a welcome to her.

The tears rose to her eyes. It was impossible to restrain them.

The next moment, at a signal from Mr. Temple, the whole company came out on the stage and formed a sort of semi-circle around her. There was a sudden silence in the audience that spoke eloquently of their delight; then, as the music died away in tender strains, little Ruby came running across the stage, holding out a magnificent basket of flowers toward Miss Marlowe.

For a moment the young girl's emotions overcame her. The lights faded from her eyes, and she forgot her surroundings completely.

Acting upon an impulse which she could not control, Marion took the basket and set it down gently, then caught little Ruby in her arms and burst out crying.

The curtain was rung down instantly, but the whole audience had seen it.

There was not a dry eye in the house, and all were calling lustily for Marion.

Manager Temple went at once to the front and made a little speech.

"Miss Marlowe is overcome by your sympathy, poor girl!" he said, pleasantly. "She has been through a fearful experience in the last two hours, and so has every member of this company. Miss Marlowe's own pluck and skill saved her from a miserable death. When she felt the cold waters closing over her head, she struck out boldly for the shore, and two brave men, who were passing under the bridge in a rowboat, heard her cries and rescued her. However, that is all over now, I am happy to say, and Miss Marlowe and her supporters will now demonstrate their ability to rise above and control their own

feelings. The play will go on with no further interruption, and I thank you beforehand for your kind attention to it."

The speech was applauded, and then the curtain rose again with the actors and actresses as composed as statues.

After that it did not matter how any one played. Every joke was applauded, and every bit of clever "business" cheered. The audience was excited and had to work off its superfluous feelings.

"Gee whiz! This beats me!" said Bert, as he mopped his forehead in the scene-room after his fifth curtain-call with Miss Marlowe and the doctor. "I've heard of people having fame thrust upon them! We'll all have to go out and buy bigger hats to-morrow, and I'll have to wear barrel hoops to keep from bursting!"

"Tell us all about it, Jackson," asked one of the stage hands; "I mean about the accident."

The others grouped around as Bert answered the question.

Marion and the doctor were doing a pretty love scene on the stage, and, as Bert was listening for his cue, he talked as rapidly as possible.

"Why, it seems that Preston mistook her for Miss Lee. She had on Miss Lee's cape, and it was almost dark on the platform. The moment she stepped out he grabbed her and threw her over the railing. Marion says there isn't a ghost of a doubt that the fellow is crazy."

There was a gasp of horror, and Miss Lee fainted. She had been standing behind a pile of scenery, where Bert could not see her.

"Thunder! I ought not to have told that!" he said, as he helped the "supe" carry her to her dressing-room; "still, the fellow was seen to do it; so she'll have to know some time. Imagine a sane man doing a thing like that, at that time in the evening, any way."

"He must be as crazy as a loon," said Miss Ellis, as she arranged a sort of couch on some trunks and boxes. "I knew he had a bad temper. She told me that herself, but it was my opinion that he was in love with Miss Marlowe."

"Miss Lee has suspected that Preston was guilty from the first; I am sure of it," said Miss Allyn. "She told Mr. Temple to have him locked up: and she wouldn't have done that if she hadn't been suspicious."

"What is Preston to her?" asked Miss Ellis, suddenly, as she bathed Miss Lee's face with some toilet-water.

"Only his cast-off sweetheart," said Bert, very slowly. "He has a wife and four children, but he ran away with this girl. Since he got his eye on Marion he has been trying to shake her."

"And to think that he chucked the girl he was in love with off the train," said the "supe," wonderingly.

Bert saw that Miss Lee was still unconscious before he answered.

"He thought it was she, I tell you. She had Miss Lee's cape on, and you remember how dark it was in the middle of that shower. Marion says he grabbed her in a grip of iron and kept his hand over her mouth to prevent her shrieking."

"He must have felt dreadfully when he discovered his mistake," remarked Miss Ellis; "and, ten to one, he don't know yet but that he killed her."

"Serves him right! The suspense will do him good!" said Bert, angrily. "He's a cold-blooded murderer, any way you look at him."

He darted away just then in answer to his cue, and, in a moment, every one but Miss Allyn was forced to follow him.

Miss Lee's eyes opened slowly, and then turned toward Miss Allyn.

"They will not kill him, will they?" she whispered, brokenly.

"They can't," said Miss Allyn, shortly. "She's alive, and he's crazy. But why do you care? Is it possible that you love him?"

Miss Lee's face turned even whiter.

"I did—I do, Miss Allyn," she said, feebly; "and, oh, I know I deserve it all! It was I who took him from his wife and children!"

Miss Allyn shuddered, but she did not move. Her arm was under the poor girl's shoulders.

For ten minutes they sat in silence, and then Miss Allyn had to go. As she left the room she kissed the wicked girl softly.

That kiss seemed to loosen the flood-gates of Miss Lee's anguish. As Miss Allyn left the room she bounded to her feet and began feverishly searching a hand-bag that stood near her.

"I will not live to see it. Oh, Frank! Frank!" she cried, wildly; "I know you hate me and that you intended killing me, Frank: but I can't help it, dear. I love you! I love you!"

She had found what she wanted—a thin, slender vial. As she raised it to her lips, Marion Marlowe dashed into the dressing-room.

There was not a sound spoken as Marion wrenched the bottle from her grasp. The next moment Miss Lee was weeping piteously on the young girl's shoulder.

CHAPTER XII.

RETRIBUTION.

When the final curtain was rung down, every member of the company was on the stage, and only Marion knew that a tragedy had been almost enacted.

Mr. Temple's face was radiant with satisfaction, and, as he confronted his company, he smiled at them gratefully.

"I owe you a lot of thanks for the way you have faced this ordeal to-night," he said, brokenly. "No company of trained professionals could have acted better under such exciting circumstances."

"Oh, we are a corking combination," laughed Bert Jackson, promptly; "warranted to meet all comers and be in two places at once! By jove! we came near doing that last this evening, Temple!"

"That's pretty nearly right!" remarked Dr. Brookes, with a glance at Marion.

"I am sure we are on the straight road to fame," said Mrs. Burnside. "The success of our first night certainly indicates it, Mr. Temple!"

"Yes, and we'll go straight through without stopping, if Marion keeps on advertising us as she has to-day," broke in Bert. "Why, do you know, when I found her in that house where her rescuers had taken her, the first words she said were, 'Bert, we mustn't keep the stage waiting! If there's a train to Cohoes to-night, I'm going to take it!'"

"Hurrah for Miss Marlowe!" yelled one of the "supes."

"That was just like her!" chimed in Miss Allyn. "Why, she'd think of others if she was being roasted alive, I guess!"

"Oh, that is carrying it too far, Alma," said Marion, laughingly; "but I must admit I was dreadfully anxious over the result of this tour! Why, will you believe it, I was planning something positively desperate in the way of an 'ad' when that awful thing happened and saved me the trouble."

"When will Preston be tried?"

Dr. Brookes asked the question abruptly.

Mr. Temple glanced at Miss Lee instinctively as he answered:

"I shall take Miss Marlowe to Albany in the morning to make her complaint. The rest of you can go on, and I will meet you at Schenectady."

"Oh, Miss Marlowe! What will you say? Will you accuse him of attempted murder?"

Miss Lee asked the question with an involuntary gasp of horror.

"If he does it will be a good thing for you, Pearl Lee!" spoke up Dick Hinton, the calcium man, excitedly. "Haven't you had enough of his treachery, I'd like to know? Why, he's done nothing but ill treat you, ever since you met him in Arizona!"

Miss Lee turned in amazement. The mystery was solved now. She knew who had told Percy Preston's secret.

"Do you wish me to save him?"

Marion asked the question curiously.

Pearl Lee fixed her eyes upon Marion's face. She was for the moment utterly oblivious to the presence of others.

"I do! Oh, I do, Miss Marlowe!" she cried, brokenly. "He is a villain, I know, but I am weak and I love him!"

"You poor, poor child!"

As Marion spoke, she went over and put her arms about her.

"Well, I am not weak, dear, and I thank Heaven that I am not! For the wrong that he has done you, rather than the wrong he has done me, I swear right here that I shall not spare him; he shall have his deserts at the hands of justice!"

But when Marion faced Percy Preston the next morning in the jail at Albany she was spared the unpleasantness of making her accusation.

The actor had been delirious the entire night, and, at the first glimpse of her face, he burst out in a fury.

"Take her away!" he shouted, with his eyes glowing like fire. "Take her away! She is dead—drowned in the water—and I killed her!"

There was no one to pacify him, and they led her away. Out of his own lips he stood accused. He thought himself guilty of murder.

The news of the tragedy had swept over the country now, and Marion's reception at Schenectady rivaled the one at Cohoes.

Howard Everett's duties as advance agent were over, and the whole company thanked him gratefully when they parted.

After the doctor's first night in the leading rôle, no one dreamed of suggesting a change of actors.

He was so handsome and so talented that he made an excellent opposite for Marion, and his love scenes were so perfect that the audiences were astonished.

No one but Marion's dearest friends knew how well this part suited the handsome doctor, and, if she blushed a little deeper at his ardent words than was absolutely necessary, the fact occasioned nothing but satisfactory comment.

"Of course, he loves her; why shouldn't he?" Bert said to Mr. Temple, when the subject was broached. "Why, the man doesn't live who wouldn't love Marion!"

"I guess that is right," was the honest

answer. "She is a wonderful girl! Why, just look at Pearl Lee! Miss Marlowe has actually reformed the creature!"

"Well, she reforms all the men; so, why shouldn't she reform the women?" asked Bert, practically. "Most girls have a hobby for reforming bad men, but there are not many who are noble enough to tackle their wicked sister women! Miss Lee is all right, or she will be when Marion gets through with her, but I'd give a dollar to know one thing, though—why does she wear eyes like an Indian and hair like a Saxon?"

Mr. Temple roared.

"You are getting too deep for me, now," he said, good naturedly. "The mysteries of a woman's toilet are too much for yours truly, but, between you and me. I believe that hair is a disguise. It's a wig, and she wears it to humor Preston. When he is safely in jail it will come off, I fancy."

"Well, I don't blame her for wanting to hide her identity," said Bert, very soberly; "but there'll be nothing to hide in the future if she sticks to Marion."

"Who is taking my name in vain?" called out a sweet voice, suddenly.

"I am, and it isn't the first time either," responded Bert, calmly. "Why, Marion, your dear name is always on my lips! I murmur it in my sleep, as the poets say, and I——"

"Oh, Bert, your sentimental nonsense will be the death of me!" laughed Marion. "Really, if I wasn't so awfully fond of you I'd be discouraged sometimes! It seems to me you will never get any sense into your cranium!"

"Don't expect too much of a fellow, Marion!" chirped Bert. "When love is in, the brains are out, or something to that effect. But here comes little Ruby—she is your shadow, Marion!"

Marion clasped the child in her arms and kissed her tenderly.

"Ruby is my escape valve," she said, with a merry laugh. "When my heart is too full I always turn to Ruby."

THE END.

The story of Marion's successful appearance at her "first-night" performance, after her thrilling experience, and the cordial reception given the Temple Theatrical Company, preceded them as they continued their tour and led to a series of brilliant "successes." It was not all to be plain sailing, however, and in next week's MY QUEEN (No. 15), a story, entitled, "Marion Marlowe in Buffalo; or, Betrayed by a Rival Company," will tell of the trying experiences the young girl went through at the hands of a jealous company, which made use of Marion's name on its playbills and tried in other ways to injure her company.

PATTERN COLUMN.

By special arrangements with the manufacturers we are enabled to supply the readers of MY QUEEN with the patterns of all garments described or illustrated in this column at TEN CENTS each. Address, "Pattern Column," MY QUEEN, 238 William Street, New York City.

☞ *In ordering patterns be sure to give size and number.*

NO. 2,359—GIRL'S THREE-QUARTER BOX-COAT.

Biscuit-colored cloth is used for developing this coat model. It is loosely fitted by under arm gores and a curved seam at the centre-back. The two-seamed coat sleeve is stitched to simulate a cuff, and is gathered at the top. Any jacket materials would be suitable for this style. The pattern is cut in sizes 4 to 12 years. Size 8 years requires one and three-quarters yards of 42-inch or one and one half yards of 54-inch material.

NO. 2,372—FIVE-GORED WALKING SKIRT.

(Length 40 inches. Perforated for 38 and 36 inches.)

The short walking skirt has "come to stay," at least all the winter, and there is a demand for it in different styles. This illustration shows a five-piece skirt having the double inverted pleat at the back. These skirts are usually made from material heavy enough to be unlined, and the lower edge is finished with a facing of the material about four inches deep. Plaid-back cloth, cheviot, camel's hair and covert would develop the design nicely. The pattern is cut in sizes 22 to 34 inches waist measure. Size 24 requires four yards of 42-inch or three yards of 54-inch material, and measures about three and three-quarter yards at the lower edge.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

BY

GRACE SHIRLEY

NOTE.—This department is a special feature of this publication, and it will be appreciated, we feel sure, by all our readers. It is conducted by Miss Shirley, whose remarkable ability to answer all questions, no matter how delicate the import, has become well known. Readers of "MY QUEEN" need not hesitate to write her on any subject. Miss Shirley will have their interests at heart and will never refuse her assistance or sympathy. As all letters are answered only through the columns of "MY QUEEN," it is unnecessary to enclose stamps. STREET & SMITH.

"Will you please give me a little advice? Is it proper for a girl of fifteen to write to a lad whom she never saw? Or should she receive calls from him? IRENE."

We do not think it proper for any one, girl or lady, to correspond with total strangers, unless it is upon some matter of business where it is necessary. Ask your mother and father to tell you what is proper, Irene, or, if you have no parents, we will always be ready to advise you.

"I am only sixteen, and have a kind mother and father. I have been reading about 'Marion Marlowe,' and think the person who wrote it must be very nice indeed and a woman of splendid character. Mother does not allow me to correspond with boys. Now, I have two boy friends whom I am very fond of, one especially. I feel that he cares for me also. He lives in another city. When he heard mother did not allow me to correspond with boys he wrote at once and said he would never do so again without her permission, but the other boy said he would keep it up as long as I did. What I want to know is which cares the most for me? Of course, I love my mother too much to disobey her in this matter, for I know she knows best.

"A LOVER OF MARION."

The boy whom you love best seems to be a very manly fellow, and we hope that your mother will let you correspond with him. We are sure you would not write him silly letters. You had better drop at once any boy or man who tries to influence you to disobey your mother. A girl of sixteen has no better friend than her mother, unless she is more than ordinarily unfortunate.

"Will you please answer me these questions? A certain young man tells me he loves me. I love him very much and have promised to marry him. He chews tobacco, which I strongly object to. I have asked him frequently to stop, but he pays little or no attention to what I ask. Do you think he loves me as he should? He, on the other hand, has asked me to stop telling falsehoods, which I willingly did because I love him in the right way. Do you think it would be better to drop him or to put up with him chewing tobacco. Please state your just opinion. LILY E. C."

Tobacco chewing is one of the most offensive habits a man can possess. A man who prefers his "cud" to the caresses of a wife is not fit to be a husband. We advise you, by all means, to give him up. When he sees that you are in earnest, he may break off the habit. If he doesn't, it will be proof that he never loved you.

"I work in my father's shop. There is a very pretty girl who works there. I have been trying to get acquainted with her for a long while, but cannot. Every noon she goes over in one corner of the shop and eats her dinner. She does not speak to any one. Kindly let me know how to get acquainted with her and oblige,

"FRANK C."

The conventional way of getting acquainted would be to have your father go to the girl and tell her that his son desires an introduction to her, and if she consents all would be well. If this does not strike your fancy, you might amble over to that particular corner and offer her a nice, large, juicy pickle to eat with her luncheon. A pickle will win the heart of almost any young girl we know of, but, if she still refuses your suit, here is another alternative: Make a sudden dive for the corner while she is eating and yell, "Mice!" like all possessed. This will, at least, force her to move towards you and exclaim, "You horrid boy!" This breaks the ice of conversation and, under the circumstances, you can consider yourself introduced.

"I am in great trouble, will you not advise me? A few weeks ago a very fine opera company visited my city, and I have fallen deeply in love with one of the leading men. His home is in a distant part of this city, as I know some of his friends. Do you think it advisable for me to seek an introduction? Of course, I would do nothing unwomanly, but it does seem as though I would have to meet him! I wonder if he is a lover of beauty! Every one says that I am very beautiful, and would be so glad if it would help to win his love. Oh, how anxiously I will await your reply in your next paper!"

You are by no means the first girl who has become infatuated with an actor. What do you know of this young man, of his character and habits? The average actor is so accustomed to attention from silly girls that he looks upon them

as neeessary evils. What reason have you for thinking he would be different from the rest, or that he is in any way a desirable acquaintance? If you meet him properly, all well and good, but we do not advise you to do any scheming to meet him. Be patient and let your lover come to you. It is not wise nor womanly to chase him "to cover."

"I have been engaged to a young man for the last year, and now that he is urging our speedy marriage, I find that I do not love him any more, but love another, who I am not sure loves me. Would you advise me to marry this one, or how can I find out whether the other loves me, as I am afraid of being an old maid. Please answer as soon as possible, as he is not the kind of man to be trifled with.

"STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL."

In spite of the fact that this letter is "strictly confidential," we are obliged to answer it in the columns of "My Queen," as it is impossible for the editor to enter into private correspondence, much as she might like to. The writer must remember that other letters have interested her and that it is only fair that her letter should be read by others. We do not advise a girl like the writer of the above letter to marry any one, as her motive for marrying is utterly unworthy. The man who is "not to be trifled with" seems to have been "trifled with" already, and the only honorable thing you can do is to release him from his contract, then wait until the other fellow sees fit to declare himself. If you lose them both, we trust it will be a lesson to you not to engage yourself to any man until you are sure you love him. There are many worse fates than being an old maid. One is to be a wife merely from a silly motive.

"Would you kindly favor me with a reply to the following through the columns of the new magazine, 'My Queen?' I am a young man of twenty-two, and only earning $12 per week. My position is steady. Do you think that a young man should marry on such a salary? My sweetheart is a good, sensible girl, and I know would make me a good wife. I have heard it stated that young men can live cheaper married than single, and I write to ask your opinion on the subject. As it is, I do not save any money. I just live up to what I make. I am anxious to marry the girl, but feel timid, thinking that my salary would not be sufficient to support two. Kindly let me hear from you through the medium of 'My Queen.' R. W."

We think twelve dollars a week a very small salary to begin married life on, unless you have a snug sum stowed away in the bank, which we judge you have not. Innumerable married couples have begun life on a smaller salary, and, so long as there is no one to consider but themselves, it is all right, but when children come to share that pittance the case assumes a different aspect. Every man must consider the question of family when he marries. Upon his decision of this important matter the whole question rests. What may be right for you and your wife might not be right for your offspring. Do not neglect man's greatest duty by shirking this subject.

"I am a young man of twenty-two. I am a milkman, and every morning I meet a young girl of about nineteen, I guess. I am very fond of her, and sometimes I think she likes me. She is a perfect stranger to me. I have been trying to draw her attention for the longest while, but all in vain. She appears to be a perfect lady, for when I wave or speak to her she simply smiles. The more I see her the more I think of her, and I think if I could win her heart I would be perfectly happy for life. Please give me your advice how I can win her heart. How can I tell whether she really loves me or not? G. G."

We are not very good at solving enigmas, so will you please tell us how you can love a girl who has never spoken to you? We do not understand this kind of affection. What do you know of her sentiments or her character? The fact that she does not answer when you speak to her looks to us as if she might be deaf and dumb. We advise you to settle this point at once, so as to be sure that you are not wasting valuable conversation. Why not offer her a glass of milk some morning? If the milk is good she will be obliged to say "Thank you," and then you can pour out your ardent longings upon the still air of the morning. We sincerely hope that she will reciprocate your love.

"I am a young girl of sixteen years. I have a stepmother who is very cruel to me and is jealous of my father's affection for me. She tries to break my engagement to a young man by telling him falsehoods about me. I am sometimes afraid he believes them, for his love is, or at least I imagine it is, a little cool. Do please tell me what to do! I am tempted to leave home, but my lover urges me to stand my mother's cruelty a little longer for his sake. Would it be unmaidenly in me to beg him to marry me at once, I am so miserable? HARRIET."

Oh, these mix-ups of mothers! Will we never hear the end of them? There is no class of women whom we find it so hard to be patient with as those who deliberately marry a widower with a family and then fail to do their duty by the innocent. You have our sympathy, as we are fully aware that you did not choose your stepmother, but, for your own sake, we must advise you to be patient. Treat your stepmother as kindly and considerately as possible, but by no means let your unpleasant surroundings hasten your marriage. Marry for love—not for convenience. It is time enough to marry when you and your lover have complete confidence in each other—a confidence which the vicious tales of other will never shake or lessen.

"I notice that most of your customers are ladies, but I guess you will help me out, as you are a good hand. I have been in love with a girl for two months, and she said she loved me dearly, but not long ago she asked me in a pitiful way if

it would insult me if she told me something? Of course I was in her favor because I loved her. She said we would have to quit going together, but she would not tell me what for. It seemed to hurt her to say this, and I know her parents didn't care, for I asked them about it. She said she would not go with any one else, and she has not. Do you have any idea of her cause? Would it be wrong for me to interfere with her any more? JACK B."

We think there is no harm in your asking the young lady to explain her actions, as it is possible she only desires to be coaxed a little. Some girls are full of little "kinks" like this when they are in love, and the most of them do it just to test their lovers. Why not manage to see her alone somewhere for a few minutes and then ask her very tenderly to tell you what is the matter. Put your arm around her, if she will let you, and when she sees how sincere you are, out will come the whole story. If this method is not a success, we advise you to let her entirely alone until she sees fit, voluntarily, to give you her confidence. We wish you success, as you seem like a nice, honest fellow.

"I am in terrible hard luck! My parents are very rich and wish me to marry rich. I have two beaux. One is very, very rich, while the one I like best is not rich at all. His parents are farmers, and he comes here to work and reeeives ninety dollars per month. This is his support, and out of it he has to send some home every month. He told my mother that he wishes he had never seen me as it would be better for both of us. I am eighteen and he twenty-four. He is handsome and good and noble as Caesar! I am tall, black eyes and light brown hair, and, to cut the story short, have everything I wish. My best beloved beau went home to see his parents while I went to the seashore. We returned about the same time and quarreled over a love song I sang. I tried to make him know that I liked him, but he said he liked me too much to think of making me love him. Is this nobleness or what? This caused a quarrel, and he has not written or come to me since. I met him last night on the car, and I told him to call. He says that he 'may if he sees fit.' What do you think of my story? He told my chum all his troubles. Don't you think he should have come to me? I'd do anything honorable for his sake. I would even marry him if he wanted me to. LITTLE JOE."

We cannot just say that we admire your best-beloved beau's character. Unlike Caesar, he is lacking in ambition. If a man is worthy of a woman, he need not fear to make her love him, especially as money does not seem to weigh in the balance. Another thing, we do not admire men who tell their troubles to women. Even their sweethearts should be spared, and their wives, as far as possible. Perhaps, if you let this young man entirely alone for a time, the fear of actually losing you will develop his character. His boorish reply to your invitation to call shows that he has a surly nature. Try to see him as he is and do not let your affection blind you. We would like to hear something of the lover whom your parents have chosen for you, the "very rich" fellow, whom you seem to ignore so completely.

"I have read a number of the letters of advice you have given to others, and I would be under obligations to you if you would answer this letter. I am engaged to a young man whom I love very dearly, but he seems inclined to be very independent and sometimes makes me feel very miserable, although I know he is perfectly true to me. He seems to enjoy making me believe he will do something I dislike. Do you think I should devote my whole life to this boy, giving up all other acquaintances? I know he is only teasing me, but I sometimes think he has a very sulky disposition. Please excuse the phrase, and will you kindly tell me how to help him overcome this, as I know he is willing for me to help him? PANSY."

If your lover is a "boy," as you say, it is quite natural that he should be a "tease," and it is very foolish of you to allow him to make you feel miserable. We do not advise any of our girl readers to engage themselves to boys, but, if they do, they must expect a few boy and girl squabbles. The only thing that you can do is to talk to this boy kindly and show him how inconsistent "teasing" is with honest affection. When a person loves truly, there is no desire to annoy the object of affection, but every effort is made to make life sweet and happy.

"I wish you would please answer a question for me. I go with a girl who wants me to do everything she says, but she doesn't want to do a thing I ask her. Please state a remedy for that. L. C."

If you had stated a few of the young lady's requirements, as well as your own, we could have told better which of the two has the best judgment. If the young lady's wisdom is superior to your own, we advise you to be guided by her, but, if not, she should listen to you in all humility. Do not marry the girl until this matter is decided, unless you wish to become a "henpeeked" husband.

"Please answer my foolish question. I am a young woman, tall, good-looking and of a very attractive appearance, but I cannot find a young man who cares for me, at least, I know of none, and people say I will never get one, I am too independent-looking. I respect good men and would like to be in company with one, but I am very cool to all men, and they seem to freeze in my presence.

"I don't care to make free with all men, but I do want one nice, respectable fellow, and I don't seem to get my desire. Please tell me why it is. Is it my own fault? I am very proud, but not of myself nor my attractions; it is born in me. I can only look for some one a little beyond common. Please let me know what you think and oblige a constant reader. C. K."

Your desire for "one nice, respectable man" is both modest and praiseworthy, and we see no reason why it should not be granted. We do not think that your natural exclusiveness will ever drive the right man from you, and we certainly

advise you to retain every particle of your innate refinement. Never mind what "people" say! The right man will come some time! See to it that when he comes he will find a young lady of education, common sense and womanly modesty, and we predict that your "look of independence" will not frighten or annoy him.

Coldness in woman is a valuable attribute. It is easy to thaw under the sun of genuine affection.

"You are so kind to all of your readers, I cannot help but come to you for a little advice myself. I am just a little perplexed by my case, which with your kind attention I will try to explain. You, I am quite sure, can and will advise me right. I am a young man, twenty-one years old. For four years I have known a little girl—a dear little one, I assure you. I say 'I have known'—I mean have loved. This young lady never knew it, though, till two months ago. I had not been over to the young lady's house for three months, and when I did call the reception I received was most gratifying, better than I had ever received before. It happened that this young lady's cousin was visiting her at this time, and I heard by their conversation that she is going to be an old maid.

"My little one said, 'I guess I will have to be one also.'

"I said, 'I do not see why. There are lots of fine young men who would only be too glad to claim you for their bride.' I do not know how I plucked up courage to say that. I was speaking for myself then.

"She retorted: 'I have met the young man whom I could love, but he never would speak.'

"Well, I kept silent then. I did more thinking than talking after that. I took it for granted it was me whom she meant. It terminated that it was I. I proposed by letter the next day. Have received no answer yet, now going on three months. I asked her if I should ever expect an answer. She said, 'Yes, am very busy—no time to answer.'

"I waited till I am tired. I tried something else. I wrote her another letter altogether different this time, did not mention a word about last letter. I merely asked her if she would go to the theatre with me. I wanted to see if that would bring an answer. It did not.

"I was always in the habit of calling without an invitation stating particular evening. I called whenever convenient, but have not been over for three weeks now, because I took it for granted I was not wanted, as I have received no invitation or answer to either letter, so I do not feel as if I would be welcome.

"That is my case, Miss Shirley, and may I be pardoned if I have intruded upon your valuable time.

"I love the little girl dearly—have for four years, but never had one bit of encouragement until that evening. Then I proposed, and now it is all over. I do not know what to do. I think she loves me, but I guess I was too quick. I probably frightened her. Your advice is earnestly solicited. READER OF 'MY QUEEN.'"

In reply to your letter, we wish, first, to offer you our sympathy in the suspense which you seem to have so patiently endured, and then to suggest that you ask her again. Have it out with her, as the saying goes. She has had plenty of time to think over your proposal by now. Perhaps her parents object to your youth and hers, or perhaps they think you will not be able to support her. At any rate, you should have talked with the old folks, and in all probability the matter would have been settled. We advise you to have the question decided at once for your own peace of mind, and the best way to do this is to go straight to the house and do your talking. "Faint heart ne'er won fair lady," you know.

"We have a question which we want you to please answer for us. We each one of us have a rival and the girls we are trying to catch don't seem to show one any more courtesy than another. We want you to please tell us how to find out which she likes the best. There are two girls, and four boys are trying to catch them. Please give us your advice on the subject.

"B. E. C. and J. L. C. J."

Your letter speaks well for the girls of your town as athletes. They must be expert runners to so successfully evade being "caught." Now, don't you really think the race would be fairer if you allowed two more girls to enter the contest? At the present ratio, it looks decidedly uneven. If the girls do not wish to be "caught," we cannot help applauding their cleverness, and we are pretty sure they do not or they would have shown some intimation of it before now. How would it do for you boys to turn and run in the opposite direction? We are sure it would be a great surprise for the girls, and it might even arouse in them a desire to follow. Then all you would have to do would be to get in the path of the right girl and fall down, when she would have no excuse for not catching you—and the rest would be easy. Girls who are hard to catch are often susceptible to these tactics, and "all is fair in love and war."

"I am scolded from morning until night because I have one or two men friends whom I allow to kiss me. My mother thinks it is awful, and says that a girl should not kiss any one but her relatives and the man she is engaged to. Please let me have your advice on this matter.

"FLORENCE R."

We do not believe in indiscriminate kissing either with relatives or with others. A woman should be chary with her favors, and bestow them only where they are valued highly. Laxity in matters of this sort is not only in very bad taste, but is a positive injury to the one who is too generous. What men get easily they never value very highly. If you do kiss one or two friends because you etseem them and really want to kiss them, you should at the same time let them understand that it is a privilege that may be withdrawn at any moment. You should not allow them to think that you are careless with your caresses.

"I am perplexed about a certain matter and must come to you for advice, dear Miss Shirley. You have been so kind to other correspondents

in the columns of 'My Queen,' which I have enjoyed reading ever so much, that I know you will not mind answering one little question for me. I have a very dear friend who wants to give me a diamond ring. I am not engaged to him, but he is the best friend I ever had. He knows I long for a ring and wants to give me one just to please me. I am not sure that he can really afford to do it. Now, ought I to accept it or not? I know he will be hurt if I refuse. ADDIE C. C."

There is really no more harm in your accepting a diamond ring than in your accepting a box of candy if they are tendered in the same spirit. Every one likes to please their friends, and that is probably the only motive that your friend has.

If he cannot afford the gift, that puts an entirely different face on the matter. We do not think that a woman has any right to accept from a man a present that he cannot afford to make. You should certainly not accept so costly a present if its presentation means self-denial and discomfort on the part of the giver.

"I am a young married woman, and my husband says I am no good because my health is poor and I insist upon keeping a servant. I make all my own clothes and the baby's, also. Is this not enough for one woman to do, besides helping the hired girl a great deal with the housework?
"MRS. C."

It is, indeed, quite enough! If you are in poor health it is almost more than you should do to care for a baby, and your husband, instead of scolding, should hire a nurse for you. It is a great pity that such husbands as yours could not have a taste of ill-health themselves. Perhaps if they did they would be more considerate. All you can do is to reason with your husband. If he will not listen to reason, we are, indeed, sorry for you.

Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup
Has been used for over FIFTY YEARS by MILLIONS of MOTHERS for their CHILDREN WHILE TEETHING, with PERFECT SUCCESS. It SOOTHES the CHILD, SOFTENS the GUMS, ALLAYS all PAIN; CURES WIND COLIC, and is the best remedy for DIARRHŒA. Sold by Druggists in every part of the world. Be sure and ask for "Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup," and take no other kind. Twenty-five cents a bottle.

PAYS STEADY MONEY.

Advice to Our Readers Either Sex Who Are Seeking Better Employment.

We receive a great many letters from men and women asking how they may increase their income.

They want work and want it steady at good reasonable pay. There are hundreds of good openings. Our advice, however, is to represent some good reliable firm and sell their goods on commission. Be contented with a sure and steady three or four dollars a day and don't dream of sudden wealth at ten or twenty dollars a day. Take any good concern, the Royal Mfg. Co., for example, and you can't make a mistake. We mention this firm because they make what the people want.

This is important. Handle nothing but what the people want to buy and you will never have any idle days. One of our readers left the farm about a year ago to represent the Royal Mfg. Co. In six months he had lifted a $500 mortgage on the farm, had lived well and has money to spare and a steady business as long as he lives.

Hundreds of other men and women have done as well, and are doing it right along. It would be a good idea for every man or woman to write to the Royal Mfg. Co., Box 67, Detroit, Mich. Look over their circulars and catalogue, which will give you an excellent idea of what we mean—sell goods that the people want, and have a sure steady income of at least three dollars every day. Do not put off writing, but go at it at once. Get an early start.

When writing to advertisers please mention "My Queen."

CATALOGUE OF ISSUES TO DATE.

1—From Farm to Fortune; or, Only a Farmer's Daughter.
2—Marion Marlowe's Courage; or, A Brave Girl's Struggle for Life and Honor.
3—Marion Marlowe's True Heart; or, How a Daughter Forgave.
4—Marion Marlowe's Noble Work; or, The Tragedy at the Hospital.
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